

Prepare To Meet Your God

Amos 4

Let's start off this morning with a little recap. In chapter 1 we learned how God announced judgement on all the nations around Israel. In Chapter 2 He announced judgment on Judah and Israel. In chapter 3 God used Amos to give Israel the reasons why He was going to bring Judgement as well as just how severe the judgement would be.

Israel had become so arrogant and complaisant that they didn't even recognize their sins as sins anymore. They were far more concerned with their image than their knowledge or wisdom of God. Knowledge and wisdom of God are not the same thing. Knowledge is the comprehension of accumulated knowledge, but wisdom is the discernment in knowing how to use that information correctly.

Here in chapter 4, I think it shows how God used different situations to get the Israelites to turn back to Him, but they did not use any knowledge or wisdom in the matter.

Let's dive in....

1 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 area of Bashan, which was in the northern part of Israel, was well known at the time for producing fat and healthy livestock. We know this because Psalm 22:12 says, ¹² *Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.* Also, Ezekiel 39:18 says, ¹⁸ *You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls—all of them fattened animals from Bashan.*

It's no exaggeration here to say that Amos calls these women "fat cows." Today we look at a size 0 woman and say that she is beautiful but in ancient times plumpness was a valued sign of affluence. However, we can count on it that at no

time in human history has a woman appreciated being called a *fat cow*. Amos uses this term because he is telling them that they are about to be led to the slaughter.

It wasn't that these women were plump and affluent; it was that they gained their wealth and affluence by oppressing and crushing the less fortunate. God saw this and promised to hold them accountable. These women may not have been directly involved in mistreating the poor. But their incessant demands for luxuries drove their husbands to greater injustices. The fact that it says "bring us some drinks" shows that they had a self-centered focus on their own pursuit of pleasure rather than helping those in need.

²The Sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness: "The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks. ³You will each go straight out through breaches in the wall, and you will be cast out toward Harmon," declares the Lord.

Amos starts off here with a solemn and sure oath. You see God's holiness is core to His very being, and so here God swore by His own existence. When he swore by his holiness, he guaranteed that the judgment would become a reality, because the holy God does not lie, nor can his holiness allow sin to go unpunished.

God told unrepentant Israel of their coming agony when they would be conquered and exiled by the Assyrians. When the Assyrians depopulated and exiled a conquered community, they led the captives away on journeys of hundreds of miles, with the captives naked and attached together with a system of strings and fishhooks pierced through their lower lip. God would make sure they were led in this humiliating manner through the broken walls of their conquered cities. This would thoroughly humble the *fat cows* of Israel.

Do you see how they are not using any knowledge or wisdom of God to save themselves from His wrath?

⁴"Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. ⁵Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings—boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do," declares the Sovereign Lord.

Because the kings of Israel did not want their people to go to the southern kingdom of Judah and sacrifice at Jerusalem, they set up rival centers of worship in cities like Bethel and Gilgal. They offered sacrifices at these places, supposedly to the LORD, but because the offering wasn't made in obedience to God, it was looked upon as yet another sin.

In Deuteronomy 14:28 it says, ²⁸ *At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns,* So Amos is saying, even if you were to bring your tithes every three years it would not matter, because it would only be for an outward showing to God.

Now, only one offering in Israel included leaven, which was the wave offering made on the day of Pentecost. Here Amos either refers to this one offering, or to mock their corrupt sacrifices, he suggests they bring offerings polluted by leaven.

Notice that it says here *"for this is what you love to do"*. The Israelites loved their corrupted worship. It was disobedient both in heart and action, but they loved it. It's always wrong to measure worship by how it pleases us because it is possible for corrupt and disobedient worship to be "wonderfully" pleasing. Of course, we don't want to get into the thinking that worship must hurt or be unpleasant to be holy and acceptable. That isn't the point. The point is here that we don't measure worship by how it makes us feel, we measure it by how it honors God.

⁶ *"I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord.* ⁷ *"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.* ⁸ *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.*

What I find so amazing here is that Amos is speaking about future events spoken in the present tense. God was going to humble Israel in such a way that they would not find any food no matter where they went.

Notice how God made the provision of rain so specific, they would know it was from His hand. Yet the message did not get through to them. To prove to them

that this rain did not come out of necessity, God was pleased to make these *most* evident distinctions. One city had rain, and could fill all its tanks or cisterns, while a neighboring city had none.

Yet you have not returned to Me: This was the greatest tragedy. Anyone can stumble into sin and feel the correcting hand of God, but we are in far greater trouble when we feel God's correction and still will not return to Him.

⁹ *"Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, destroying them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord.* ¹⁰ *"I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord.* ¹¹ *"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.*

Because Israel would not listen to the chastisement of the LORD, His hand grew more and more heavy upon them. This wasn't a demonstration of God's anger, but of His *love*. He starts His chastisement slow and increases it incrementally, so that God can use the smallest amount of discipline necessary to turn our hearts back to Him. If we will not turn back, the hand of chastisement grows heavier and heavier, out of loving desire to see our repentance.

God saw Israel as a glowing ember plucked from the fires of judgment, like the judgment that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah. Even though God spared them, they did not respond in gratitude, knowledge or wisdom – they have not returned to God.

¹² *"Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God."* ¹³ *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.*

This is a sober warning, appropriate for all of us at all times, because we never know when we will meet our God in eternity. Matthew 25:13 says, ¹³ “*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.*” We don’t know when, so we must always be prepared to meet our God – but this is especially true for those facing the judgment of God.

Now we can actually apply those words, prepare to meet your God, in 3 ways, as a challenge, an invitation, or as a summons.

As a challenge, God invites His enemies to prepare to meet Him. You know that a boxer prepares long and hard before stepping into the ring against an opponent. If you are going to step into the ring with God, you had better be prepared! Perhaps Amos was telling them to prepare for battle with God because they lacked all knowledge and wisdom of Him.

As an invitation, this is a blessing. The summons, prepare to meet your God was nothing but a blessing to Adam. Ever since the fall, it is our nature to hide from God, so the call prepare to meet your God has a different sense entirely. Still, if we will come to God we must prepare ourselves.

As a summons, we must recognize that one day we all will stand before God and give an account. “Think awhile upon who it is that you have to meet! You must meet, your God! You are going to meet God whose laws you have broken. He who has seen your heart, and read your thoughts, and jotted down your affections, and remembered your idle words, you must meet Him. The God who will see through the veils of hypocrisy and all the concealments of formality. There will be no making yourself out to be better than you are before him.”

Here again, God highlighted the point by emphasizing Who it is that makes the point, a God we should never consider lightly, when he says “*the Lord God Almighty is his name.*”

Notice how He does that:

He is the God of all creation (He who forms mountains, and creates the wind).

- He is the God who is absolutely sovereign over man (who declares to man what his thought is).
- He is the God with all power over nature (and makes the morning darkness).
- He is the God who rules above all (who treads the high places of the earth).

Proverbs 4:7 says, *“The beginning of wisdom is this: Get^[a] wisdom. Though it cost all you have,^[b] get understanding.”*

So as Christians, it is imperative that we not only acquire knowledge but also that we seek wisdom so that we are able to see the events of our day from God’s viewpoint.

James 1:5-6 says, *⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*

Let’s not end up like the Israelites but seek the knowledge of God and His wisdom in all that we do. Let’s be prepared to meet our God!