

Christ in Amos

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

How did you get to church tonight? Let's go, show of hands, who were the walkers? Who walked to church?

Okay, good, get your steps in. Who were the drivers? Drive to church.

Okay, yeah. Sometimes you just live too far away. Train, anyone catch the train to church?

No, yeah, train. Bus, any bus takers? No one.

What about helicopter? You know we have a helipad on the roof. People sometimes, no, we don't, not really.

What about this? Ferry, now I want to go home. Ferry to church.

Well done. Okay, that's how did you get to church? What about when did you get to church?

And be honest, before 5 p.m., after 5 p.m., during the worship. Okay, put your hand down. This is the hard one.

Why did you come to church tonight? Don't answer that. Why did you come to church tonight?

If we were honest, maybe some of us are like, dinner after church is a good vibe. It's good to hang out with friends. And that's the main reason why I'm at church.

If you were honest, maybe it's like, I really enjoy playing soccer and basketball. And that's the main reason why I come to church. Maybe you think the music is pretty good, and that's kind of the main reason you come.

I have no judgment for you if that's like honestly your reasoning. Frankly, part of the reason why I'm here is because I'm paid to be here. So I'm not better than anybody else.

But those things, they're not bad things. To come to church for community, for sport, for worship, for even food, they're not bad things, but surely they are secondary things.

The main reason we come to church is to glorify and encounter the living God, yes? And so the problem is when the main thing stops being the main thing, and these secondary reasons take the place for why we come to church.

Why did you come to church tonight? The Book of Amos addresses that question. Amos was a shepherd who was called by God to be a prophet, probably ministering around 750 BC.

That means he is before the exiles of Israel and of Judah. And Amos was, he wrote a book really sharply criticizing Israel for their injustice, for the fact that they had got their priorities mixed up.

And so our teaching text tonight that Zach has read for us is Amos chapter 4. 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.

That's a weird passage. Can you tell God is being sarcastic? Amos, God, through the prophet Amos, is criticising and speaking to a people that have got their priorities wrong.

The people who are doing all the right things, sacrificing the right amount, giving the right amount, going to temple at the right time, the right number of times a year, doing all the right things, but for all the wrong reasons.

They've got their order of priorities mixed up. And so God, through the prophet Amos, wants to reshape their priorities. And I think that's what God might want to do among us tonight.

Why did you come to church tonight? We have a lot of good reasons, but let's make sure that the main thing is the main thing.

The next verses of Amos chapter 4, there are five situations that God seems to be using to try and draw his people back to himself. Five situations where God is trying to reform the priorities of his people.

So tonight, five questions to ask yourself before you come to church. Five questions to ask yourself before you come to church.

Amos 4 verse 6. This is the first of the situations. God says, 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.

Here's the first question to ask yourself before you come to church. Am I hungry for the word of God? Am I hungry for the word of God?

The context behind what Amos is saying is a famine, right? Lack of food, relatively common in the ancient world, agricultural society, even a relatively common theme in the Bible. Can you think of characters that experience a famine?

Joseph? Ruth? Yep.

Elijah? Yep. Gosh, there's even more than I thought of.

Abraham? Jacob? Lots of famines in the Bible.

Later in Amos, we read in Chapter 8, The days are coming, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine through the land. Okay, a famine, lack of food.

But then God says, not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.

It's a famine of hearing the words of God. That's what Amos is talking about. That the people have experienced God withholding his word and they have not hungered for it.

They have not desired that God would speak. Do you remember when Jesus was in the wilderness fighting the devil and the devil came to him and said, tell those stones to become bread, what did he say? Man shall not live on bread alone, but on what?

Every word that comes from the mouth of God. God is teaching us to hunger for his word. That's part of why we come to church, because we are hungry to hear from God, what God thinks about us and about the world.

Have you heard it said before that we live in the information age? The information age. I read some statistics this week.

This is literally insane. Every day, there are 500 million new tweets. Every day, there are 294 billion emails sent.

Every day, 65 billion WhatsApp messages are sent. And most of them are from Tristan. Sorry for the drive by.

Every day, 720,000 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube. I read another stat that said that if you take all of the information that... I'm sorry, bro.

That was just uncalled for.

If you take all of the information that human beings have produced in all of human history up to 2003, take all that information, apparently, I don't know how they calculate this, in two days, we recreate the same amount of information.

We live in the information age. There is more information out there than we could ever understand with our mind. We are not starved for information, but we are starved for truth.

Information is not the same thing as truth. Information fills our head with facts, but truth changes our heart with power. We are not starved for information, but starved for truth.

I deleted social media a couple of, maybe six months ago, because I just found the doom scrolling thing too much. Information, like it literally never ends, just keep on scrolling and scrolling.

And when I deleted social media, I was like, I'm sort of deleting it so that I can read the Bible more. So whenever I used to read the Bible, I used to doom scroll, I'm going to read the Bible.

And I discovered that the Bible is not as entertaining as YouTube Shorts. It's heavy. It's a solid meal.

It's like high GI food and low GI food. Is it high GI is like quick, sugary kind of stuff. It's just constant information.

But the Word of God is solid and dense, something to eat and to chew on. That's why Psalm 1 says blessed is the one who what? Meditates, not who chews really quickly and just swallows and gets so much in, but who meditates on scripture.

It's this image of hungering for the Word of God and chewing on it, savouring it slowly. So can I ask you, when you came to church tonight, were you hungry for the Word of God? Were you hungry to listen to the only voice that really matters?

I'm learning that the most important voice that speaks tonight is not my voice as the preacher, it's God's voice from His Word and by His Spirit. So we come hungry to hear the Word of God.

Amos 4 verse 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. 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.

Here's the second question to ask yourself before you come to church. Am I thirsty for the presence of God? Am I thirsty for the presence of God?

Amos began by referring to a famine, a lack of food. The next situation in Amos 4 is a drought, a lack of water. Now, water is also an interesting theme in the Bible.

You guys know the Bible Project? They have a really, really, really good series on, I think it's called Water of Life. And they trace the theme of water all throughout scripture from the start to the end.

And one of the fascinating things that I learnt about water in the Bible is when God saved his people out of slavery, where did he save them from? Egypt. When Judah went into exile for their sin, where did they go?

Babylon. So Egypt and Babylon, both of these places, Israel spent a lot of time outside of the promised land. Both of those places are irrigated by rivers.

The Nile River in Egypt famously swells once a year. The rains from the high mountains in Ethiopia flow north and irrigates the whole land and they get their crops from a river.

Likewise, in Babylon, you have the Tigris and Euphrates River, and the Babylonians had dug these channels, irrigation channels to water all the land and grow their crops. But you know what doesn't have rivers that sustain agriculture? What place?

The promised land. So God called his people out of well-irrigated river lands to a place that relies on the rain to grow crops.

The picture that Bible Project were bringing out is that God intentionally led his people to a place where they had to depend on his presence. Because if he doesn't make it rain, they don't eat.

It's a picture of the dependence of the people of God on his rain. Do you thirst for the presence of God? Do you come to church desiring to encounter God?

When we talk about the presence of God, it's worth clarifying. We sometimes talk about omnipresence and manifest presence. Omnipresence means everywhere presence.

God is everywhere. Solomon prays in 2 Kings, Chapter 8, the heavens, even the highest heavens, can't contain you. God is everywhere.

He was in this room before you walked into this room. But then we also talk about the manifest presence of God.

And that is this idea that God, though being everywhere at all times, chooses to make his presence especially known in certain places at certain times for certain purposes.

And so when we gather together in the name of Jesus, we ask God to make his presence manifest. Most of the time when I'm worship leading and I do the prayer at the start of the service, I mention something like that. Would you be present amongst us?

I'm not asking that God would be omni present. I know he's omni present, but that his manifest special presence would be among us. Are you thirsty for the presence of God?

The truth is, and don't nod your head if you agree with this, church can be really dry without the presence of God. Don't nod your head. Church can be really dry.

If God is not present in this room, we're kind of singing the same songs and we're not doing them like that, that well. We're talking about the same book, retelling the same story. Church can be really dry without the presence of God.

In fact, sometimes people who have been at this church and then have gone away for whatever reason will come back and visit, and it's really cool. It's like, oh my gosh, haven't seen this person in 10 years.

And every time I talk to them, it's like, what's new with you? And they have a new job and a new girlfriend and a new house and so much new stuff. And then the conversation turns and they say, what's new with you, Ben?

Same old, same old, like same church, singing the same song, same story, same preaching, same words. And I almost feel ashamed that they have moved on and so much new stuff in their life, but here we are just singing the same stuff.

Church can be really dry if God is not present here by His Spirit. But if God is present here, then that changes everything because God could actually do something. Do you come to church thirsty for the presence of God?

It's a challenging question. Jesus said in John 5, you study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Jesus is saying that the Bible is true, but it points to a person.

I wonder if Jesus might also say, you sing your songs passionately because you think that in them is the presence of God, but these are the very songs that point to me, and yet you refuse to come to me.

So when we gather together for church, we invariably have community time, Bible reading, prayer, preaching the word, singing together. We do all the same things, not because the power is in those things, but in the person that they point us to.

Are you thirsty for the presence of God? That's the second question to ask yourself before you come to church.

Amos 4 verse 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.

Here's the third question to ask yourself before you come to church. Am I sickened by my sin? Am I sickened by my sin?

Amos refers to gardens and vineyards. It's a picture of fruitfulness, right? Fruit and wine.

Do you know that we're called to live a fruitful life? Did you know that? Followers of Jesus are meant to bear fruit for God's glory and for His kingdom.

In Matthew 13, the parable of the sower, Jesus says that the good soil that receives the word and bears fruit bears 100 times what is sown. We are called to live a fruitful life. But do you know what blight and mildew are?

Blight is a Hebrew word meaning what happens to plants when they get scorched by the wind. You imagine like a hot wind that just withers the plant. That's blight and mildew is a fungus that grows over plants.

God is talking about the fruitfulness that Israel was supposed to be, and then this hot wind and this fungus that does not destroy them, but it chokes their fruitfulness.

The picture of what those two things do, blight and mildew, is not that it kills the plant, but it makes it unfruitful. There's a lot of unfruitful Christians, and they're being choked by blight and mildew. I think blight and mildew for us is sin.

Now, if you're a follower of Jesus tonight, then praise God, you have been set free from the penalty of your sin. We have been forgiven. Our sin has been separated from us as far as the east is from the west.

Praise God, set free from the penalty of sin, but we Christians are still learning how to live in freedom from the power of sin. Free from the penalty, but we're learning how to live free from the power.

And so at times, all of us can be choked by sin, by blight and mildew that chokes the fruitfulness of our life. The NBA season has just started. Go the Chicago Bulls.

And so I've been playing basketball a little bit more. And I theoretically know how to shoot like a perfect form shot. And I want to teach you guys how to do a perfect form basketball shot.

Feet shoulder width apart, bend your knees, dominant hand flat, supporting hand on the side. Ball starts at your hips, three motions. Ball to your forehead, knees up, and that.

Ideally, the support hand does nothing apart from stabilise you like this. So really, a good basketball shot is straight, perfect, duck hand at the end. Theoretically, I know how to shoot a perfect basketball shot.

But when we're actually playing basketball, I do this in like the heat of the game against Hamish or something, he's like coming up on me defending. I do this thing where I shoot and my, this hand gets involved.

It shouldn't be involved, but it gets involved. And because this hand pushes this way, this hand has to push that way. So I end up doing this.

And it looks stupid and it doesn't go in. And it's so frustrating, because I know how to shoot the basketball properly, and yet there is something in me that keeps messing up. Stephen and Tristan and the others can attest.

Sometimes I shout in frustration, Sin in my members.

Romans 7, this image of, I know the good that I want to do, and I know what I don't want to do, but I find myself continually doing the stuff that I don't want to do, even though I know what I should do.

It's this image of knowing the right thing, but being unable to make it happen. Of knowing how to do a basketball shot, but failing every time. This is what sin does to us.

It chokes us. And so part of the reason why we come to church is to receive grace to help us learn new habits of life. To get rid of the sin habits.

Get rid of that thing. What is that? And learn to bless your enemy.

Pray for those who persecute you. So that the righteous thing is what comes naturally. Dallas Willard once said that rarely...

Thank you. I think this is my only Willard quote. Rarely does a mature Christian ever consciously, deliberately decide to do evil.

Just think about that for a sec. Rarely do they consciously decide to do evil. They just do it because it's in their body.

You know, you get cut off in traffic and then you throw a finger and say a certain type of word. It's not conscious, it's just there's something in me. Sin in my members.

There's something in me that makes me do this when I shoot a basketball.

And so part of the reason we come to church is because we're sickened by the power of sin that entangles us and longing to be encouraged by gathering together with the saints, learning new habits that kill sin and help us bear fruit for the glory of

God. Do you come to church sickened by your sin into the presence of the one who can change you?

Amos 4 verse 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.

Here's the fourth question to ask yourself before you come to church. Am I grieved by the state of the world? Am I grieved by the state of the world?

Amos here refers to plagues, violence, theft and death, presumably to events in Israel's real past where they were repressed and suffered. He's also looking forward to what is going to happen in the exile, this experience of suffering.

And God says that in the midst of that suffering, God was trying to reform their priorities, trying to change their hearts. It seems to me like suffering, we all experience suffering, you can't escape that.

But it tends to do one of two things to a person, it pushes them towards God or away from God. That's what suffering does.

And it seems to me like a big part of what makes the difference between the two is your capacity to lament, and your willingness to bring the suffering into the presence of God. Suffering happens. Have you seen the news recently?

I'm not referring to anything in particular, apart from the news in general. We don't live in a great world, violence, brokenness, pain, suffering. We're supposed to bring that before God.

That's why we come to church, to lament. Did you know 40 percent of the Psalms are Psalms of lament? I think that's 60 out of 150, and Sam can do the maths to confirm.

I think 40 percent of 150 is 60. 40 percent of the Psalms are articulating the brokenness in my life and in this world, and bringing it into the presence of God. That's why we come to church, grieved by this world.

I caught myself a couple of months ago saying, Oh God. And I kind of was like, Whoa, where did that? Wow, I'm sorry Lord for saying that.

That was weird. And then I observed myself over the coming days, and I realized that I think I say, Oh God, not as a kind of swear word, curse, blasphemy type thing, but as a lament, a prayer of lament.

Because I was watching myself and the times when I say, Oh God, well, when you read the news, the conflict continues in Ukraine, Iran, Israel, and Palestine. Helen Haynes has lost both of her legs now. He said, Oh God, it's not a swear word.

It's shorthand for saying, God have mercy on us. It's a prayer of lament. That's what the Psalms teach us to do, to bring suffering into the presence of the God who can do something about it.

So I wonder if you came to church tonight, grieved by the state of the world. We're called to bring our lament before God. Interestingly, there's 40% of the Psalms are lament and roughly 40% are thanksgiving Psalms as well.

Thanksgiving Psalms mean like, God is so good, he's been so good to me, I'm so glad and happy to praise God. And the lament Psalms are like, why God are you so far away from me, evil people surround me.

The Bible, the Psalms almost have the same number of Psalms of lament as the end of thanksgiving. Because as a community, we are supposed to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. We looked at this a couple of weeks ago.

We bring our real selves before God, and he responds to us. Am I grieved by the state of the world? You can bring yourself before God.

That's the fourth question to ask yourself before you come to church.

Last one, Amos 4 verse 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.

Here's the fifth and final question to ask yourself before you come to church. Am I drawing near with fear and trembling? Am I drawing near with fear and trembling?

Amos refers back to Sodom and Gomorrah. Do you remember that story? Genesis 19, Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities that are just wickedly evil, terribly unjust and evil toward the innocent.

And so God in his justice brings his judgment upon their sin from the future day into the present. God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah for their sin with like burning sulfur, meteors or something. He destroys them.

And then frequently the Bible points back to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of the judgment of God against sin.

And the reason that the Bible frequently brings up Sodom and Gomorrah is to help us remember the nature of the God that we come before. He is love and grace, but he's also justice and righteousness. He judges sin.

And it is a good thing for us to hold those two things at the same time. Hebrews 4:16, let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

That's the wild truth of the gospel, that we can come into the presence of a holy God and give him thanks and put our prayers before him. But to come before his throne of grace with confidence is not the same thing as ignorance.

So I ask you, when you come to church, are you conscious that you are drawing near to a holy God and that we are supposed to draw near in fear and trembling and yet paradoxically also as children coming into the presence of their father?

Somebody I saw entering church, we had the wall shut, and they walked in and the moment they stepped over the threshold, they crossed themselves and looked up and walked in. Probably Catholic background, I'm guessing.

But if nothing else, that shows a respect for the God that this person was entering the presence of. How do you walk into church? Is it just like waltzing in?

That's okay, because God is our father who welcomes us. But we have to also draw near with fear and trembling. I know there are people who won't eat supper in the auditorium, because it's respect for the holiness of God.

Eat supper in the foyer. I respect that so much. It's remembering the character of the God that we serve.

You know Exodus 34, the great revelation of the character of God. Yahweh, Yahweh, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

That's the love part. And then often we don't want to say the next bit, but he does not leave the guilty unpunished, punishing the children and their children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

But in the God revealed in Jesus, we see love and justice held together. And so, do you remember that image of centripetal and centrifugal force? Centrifugal force is this one.

The force that pulls us in. The love of God draws us. And centripetal force, I know it's not a real force, it's inertia misunderstood, but imagine it as a force, pushes away.

That's the holiness of God. It drives sinful people away, but the love of God draws them near. And so, in the love and justice of God, we are held in perfect orbit around him.

So, when we come to worship him, do you hold those two things together? We come with fear and trembling before a holy God, and with confidence before our Father in heaven.

Five questions to ask yourself before you come to church. Am I hungry for the word of God? Am I thirsty for the presence of God?

Am I sickened by my sin? Am I grieved by the state of the world? Am I drawing near with fear and trembling?

If we as a church would answer yes to those questions, God would reform our hearts, and he would be putting the main thing as the main thing. Praise God.

We get to come to church and worship him, give him thanks, sing songs, come under his word, and enjoy community, enjoy dinner together, enjoy playing soccer, but only because we keep the main thing the main thing.

We're here to worship God and enjoy community together. Five times, that line gets repeated. Did you notice?

Yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. Five times, that exact same line comes. So may we be a church that that is not true of.

May we be a church that return to the Lord in repentance. Would you like to stand? Let's have a moment in prayer before we worship.

I just invite you to consider the place that your heart is coming from as you draw into the presence of God. Holy God, you are the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. You are holy.

And we come before you with fear and trembling, acknowledging your greatness. And at the same time, with gratitude, we get to call you Abba Father because of what our Lord Jesus has done.

And so it is our privilege, God, to stand here in your presence as your people, chosen and loved and kept by the Gospel.

It's our privilege to come under your word, to sing songs together that lift up the name of Jesus, to pray, to bring our needs before you, and even to have dinner and enjoy playing games together and being the people of God.

So help us, Lord, to keep the order of those things correct, that we are here for you because you draw us near, to give you thanks and praise. We return to you, Lord, and give you the worship that you're worthy of. In Jesus' name, Amen.