



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Amos: Let Justice Roll

Midcourse Correction: Making Changes Before It Is Too Late

Amos 9

Tim Badal | July 28, 2019

Turn in God's Word to the book of Amos. For the past few weeks, we've been exploring this often-neglected Old Testament book by one of the minor prophets. Amos was an ordinary man whom God called, a shepherd and a caretaker of sycamore trees. He was from a city in Judah named Tekoa, not far from Jerusalem and even closer to Bethlehem.

God called this man, who was living an obscure, average life, to do something Amos probably never expected to do. Amos did not come from a line of prophets or other great men. More likely he was just going about life with his family and friends when God called him to a unique role.

This reminds us that God often calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Before we get too excited, we need to realize that the call God gave to Amos did not bring him any popularity. He was assigned the task of proclaiming the judgment God was about to bring to Israel. He was to warn them of coming calamity if they did not repent and turn from their sin back to God. In this series we have seen God give warning upon warning, only for the people to remain stiff-necked and rebellious. Even as they continued to play at religion, they were essentially telling God no.

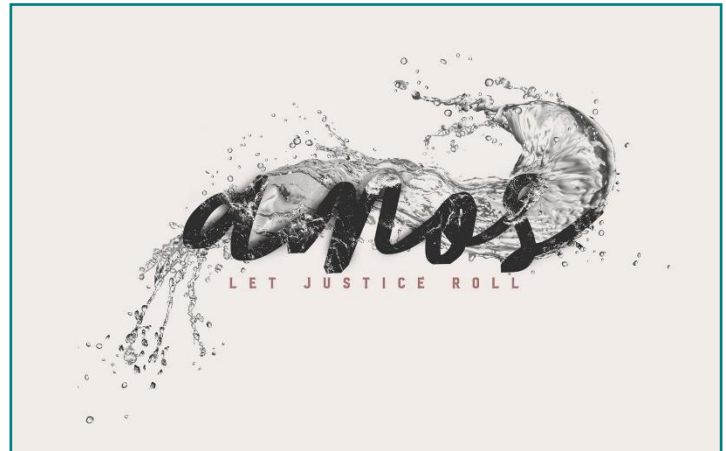
Amos' message should bring clarity and conviction to us as well: "Return to God before it's too late." Even though Amos lived eight centuries before Christ, that message resounds to our world today, calling each of us to turn from our sin and return to God before it's too late. If we don't return to God, judgment and destruction will come upon us.

We can see God's faithfulness in the middle of the judgments He was warning the nation of Israel about through Amos, because in these warnings He was also giving them time to repent. As we discussed last week, the day of the Lord was definitely going to come. We see in this book the longsuffering of God, as each message from Amos also gave them time to repent. God's warnings through Amos came in the form of visions of the calamities that were about to befall the people. But as we saw, the Israelites chose not to pay attention to these warnings. As a result, we'll be reading God's final word to the people, a word that describes great sorrow. It's probably the most unique warning they received, still giving them one last opportunity to change course.

This morning we'll be looking at Amos 9 which will start out ugly. This book has been filled with doom and gloom. But at the end of the book, Amos was given a glimpse of coming days that promise to knock your socks off. They were words intended to encourage the faithful remnant who would rise up out of the time of great difficulty in Israel. So let's read this chapter, beginning in verse one:

¹ I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said: "Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away; not one of them shall escape.

² "If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. ³ If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search them out and take them; and if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them. ⁴ And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them; and I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good."



⁵The Lord GOD of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt; ⁶who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth; who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the surface of the earth— the LORD is his name.

⁷“Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel?” declares the LORD. “Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir? ⁸Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,” declares the LORD.

⁹“For behold, I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall to the earth.

¹⁰All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, ‘Disaster shall not overtake or meet us.’

¹¹“In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, ¹²that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the LORD who does this.

¹³“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. ¹⁴I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,” says the LORD your God.

This concludes the book of Amos.

We are in the dog days of summer—the end of July. School is right around the corner. As baseball fans, the end of July is a significant time. This is the trading deadline, when teams have to make decisions. There are two months left in the regular season before the post-season begins, so each team needs to decide if it’s ready for the post-season or if they need to do some last-minute trading without having to go through the arduous process of waivers.

There are two types of baseball teams right now. Some of them are hoping to enter the World Series. There’s a team in Chicago that’s going in that direction. We would call them “buyers.” They’re looking for players to trade that would improve their team. Then there are teams who are “sellers.” These are teams that haven’t done so well this year and there’s little to no chance they’re going to make the post-season. We have a team in Chicago in that group; we’ll leave them nameless. But they’re selling because they realize their future is not bright and they need to make some changes to hopefully improve their team for the next year.

I give you this illustration to say that in life, we too sometimes need to make midcourse corrections. Just as during the baseball season, there are points in our lives when we need to ask ourselves, “Is the trajectory of our lives heading toward victory or defeat?”

As a 43-year-old man, I’m at a unique place in my life where I have to start asking, “Are there midcourse corrections I need to make?” I’ve had enough time in my past to know where I’ve been and I still have quite a future ahead of me. But it’s hard to teach old dogs new tricks. Midcourse corrections can be costly. If we want victory in our future, it may mean changes need to take place now.

Amos 9 gives one last opportunity for the people of Israel to make a midcourse correction and change the trajectory of their lives. God gave them two truths they needed to think through, which would lead them to evaluate their lives. Were they getting closer to God or farther from Him?

His message to them was essentially this: “Life apart from Me will end in tragedy, but life with Me will end in triumph. Now ask yourselves what kind of future you want.” Even though Amos was faithful to bring this message, sadly—as we read the rest of the Bible—most of the nation of Israel chose tragedy on their own terms rather than live a life of triumph with God. Instead, they continued in their rebellion, then as a result, the judgment God was warning them about soon befell them.

So as we have their example before us, let’s look at these two truths and consider how we ourselves are living. What are we pursuing and is there a midcourse correction needed for us in light of the warnings and promises of God through Amos?

Life apart from God ends in tragedy.

The first truth is that life apart from God will lead to tragedy. Over the last eight chapters, Amos has clearly communicated that God was unhappy with how the nation of Israel was living. There were many sins involved, but one sin provided a lens through which all the rest of Israel’s sins could be viewed. They had decided that they would live their lives apart from God.

Can I tell you that this is the overarching sin of all humanity? Instead of living life with God, we would rather choose to live apart from Him. That was the original sin in the Garden of Eden where God had a relationship with Adam and Eve. They were enjoying

fellowship together, but instead of continuing to live life with God, they were tempted to think they could live on their own—and that's what they did. The prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 53:6, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way."* Instead of following God and living in relationship with Him, we are drawn away by a myriad of temptations. In short, we choose to live life apart from Him.

You might think, "Wait a minute. Were the Israelites really that far from God?" As we've seen, they continued their practices of temple worship, they continued to give tithes and offerings, and they kept the various festivals. But God told them their religious activities did not mean they were actually in a relationship with Him.

I need to tell you that many, many people today are entering into houses of worship thinking they are living life with God, but all it represents to them is a means to an end. They don't view God as the Master of the universe or the Savior and Lord of their lives. Rather, they see Him as the way to get other things. That's what the Israelites were doing. They saw God as the means of getting benefits; otherwise they lived apart from Him.

Living life apart from God involved a couple things. First, it meant they weren't hearing from Him. In Amos 3-5, God literally said, "Israel, shut up and listen. Stop thinking you're so smart. Stop doing things your own way and pay attention to Me." God wants to speak to His people, but when we live apart from God we're essentially saying we don't need to hear from Him. We want to do things our own way.

Then Amos goes farther. Despite all their celebrations, offerings and other services, we're told in Amos 3:10 that the people of Israel did not know how to live right. It says they stored up violence against the vulnerable and the poor. Although they did religion as a duty, there was no real relationship with God. Rather, they followed the gods of the neighboring communities. God told them, "Okay. I love you. Are you not My people? Are you not the ones I rescued from Egypt? If that's true, then My promises are sure and right. So I'm going to give you the opportunity to right your wrongs." Though it's understandable for the pagan world to live apart from God, surely it was not right for the people who had Moses and the other the patriarchs, along with the law and covenant to do so."

So God sent Amos to His people who were far from Him and Amos warned them of what would happen if they continued to live separated from God. Amos was given a series of ghastly visions of the calamities and destruction that would come upon those who were apart from God. In fact, God reached the point where He called the people His enemies.

Yet we wonder why, in the days of Amos, Israel was experiencing some of their greatest times of prosperity. That was because of God's longsuffering, patience and His common grace He gives to the world. To be honest, that's why today some of our unsaved neighbors and family and coworkers are living a better life now than maybe you are as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. God tells us that He pours out His rain on believers and non-believers alike.

Then in the middle of their security and prosperity, God told them there was a day coming. For the Israelites, that day came about 40 years after Amos gave his warnings when the Babylonian empire came and destroyed the land, taking their people as slaves into exile. Israel was left as a wasteland.

We see in our text today what God wants to teach us about that day. We'll see three things that happened in the seventh century before Christ, but these truths will also apply to the day coming for us as well. Just as Israel was judged, so we too will face judgment on that day of calamity.

This tragedy will be inevitable.

We read in Amos 8:11 where God said, *"Behold, the days are coming..."* You can mark it down. It's iron clad. This day is going to come and it's already on God's calendar. God was telling the people that the only way to avoid judgment on that day would be to repent. Twice He told them, "Seek Me and live." There was yet opportunity, but the people continued to renege on those opportunities God was giving them and thus all they had to look forward to was a day on God's calendar when they would experience His judgment.

So we wonder, "What about us?" Paul reminds us in his Mars Hill sermon in Acts 17:30, *"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent."* Why? Paul goes on in verse 31, *"Because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*

Just as the day came for the people of Israel, there will be a future day when God will bring judgment. Now while we're in the season in between, all men everywhere have the opportunity to repent. We need to be aware that the day will come. It's inevitable.

This tragedy will be inescapable.

Second, this day will be inescapable. In Amos 9 we begin to get an idea of what that judgment would be like. We read in verse one that God was going to *“strike the capitals until the thresholds shake.”* The picture here is that God would impact every element of Israel’s life. In Hebrew, the word “capitals” referred to their places of authority. God would destroy the political kingdom of Jeroboam. But it also included spiritual authority—the temples that had been built throughout Israel would be destroyed. Finally, their centers of commerce would fall as well.

Verse one continues, *“Not one of them shall flee away; not one of them shall escape.”* To be sure, people would try to run away from the destruction, but look at God’s response to that: *“If you dig into Sheol,”* the underworld, *“I’ll find you. If you climb up to heaven, I’ll find you. If you go to the highest mountain—Mt. Carmel—I will find you. If you go to the bottom of the sea, I will find you. If you’re free, I’ll find you. If you’re in captivity, I will find you.”*

Wherever the people might try to go, they would not be able to escape. It’s important for us to understand that if we’re under the wrath of God, if we are His enemy because we’re living apart from Him, nothing can separate us from His wrath. That means, brothers and sisters, that because of Christ, nothing can also separate us from the love of God. That’s the great exchange. If we don’t have Christ in our lives and if we are not walking with Him, then nothing can separate us from His wrath.

But as believers, we can know that because of Christ there is now nothing that can separate us from His love. In Romans 8:39 Paul uses similar terminology to what we read in Amos 9, saying that neither height nor depth, nor any other opposites—life or death, angels or demons—nothing can separate us from Him. But for those who are apart from God, the only thing they should expect is His wrath and judgment. Nothing will be able to protect them. They won’t be able to flee it or hide from it.

This tragedy will be insurmountable.

Even though God spoke clearly to the people through the prophet Amos, they still did not believe. In Amos 9:10, the people said, *“Disaster shall not overtake or meet us.”* They had listened to Amos begging them to return to God, *“Seek Him and live.”* But their response was, *“Hey, Amos, stop all the doomsday talk. God’s not going to hurt us. Disaster is not coming on us. We have great houses, walled cities and all the security we need. We feel safe from anything that might come.”*

That sounds like many people we live and work with today, doesn’t it? We can tell them of coming calamity for those who live apart from God, but they reply, *“I’m okay. I’m good. If there is a God, I’ll figure out what to say to Him then. I’ll talk my way into heaven— if there even is a God.”*

God’s view of all this is very clear. Not only were His inescapable judgments clearly described, but He also provided some of His own resumé in Amos 9:5-6. For anyone who didn’t think He was capable of the coming disasters, here’s what He said: *“The Lord God of hosts”* is the One Who *“touches the earth and it melts...who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth; who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the surface of the earth.”*

In other words, it’s as though God took a pitcher and poured out the oceans on to the foundations of the earth. The Pacific Ocean? That was half a pitcher. The Atlantic, a quarter of a pitcher. Don’t forget about the Indian Ocean—let’s pour that in too. All of the seas show us how big God is.

If you think, O feeble man or woman, that you are going to escape or somehow transcend this judgment, God says, *“This is Who I am. You cannot escape My judgment. Don’t think you’ll be able to flee from it.”* These are tough words and many of us don’t want to hear them. God is a righteous and holy God, demanding worship from His creation.

We need to understand why God eventually became so angry. He created this world and gave us everything we need—life, breath, loved ones and the ability to enjoy life. He did all of this, then after we receive His gifts, we turn and tell Him, *“No thanks, I don’t want a relationship with You.”* We want nothing to do with Him, but we still feel we have the right to enjoy His gifts.

For a while, God is patient with us. For a season, He continues to give us the opportunity to repent and turn back to Him. We might think it’s because He’s asleep at the wheel or maybe because He’s somehow no longer in control. But God makes it clear in His Word, *“Don’t presume upon My patience and longsuffering as being anything other than an expression of My desire for all people to come to Me in repentance, so none will perish.”*

Then in the verse after 2 Peter 3:9, where God says He doesn’t want anyone to perish, we read *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”*

That time will come. Maybe today you're living apart from God. As Amos and Paul have said, and less significantly what I have said, "The life you're living will lead you to tragedy." But in the face of all the storm clouds and doom and gloom we've read about for eight and a half chapters, we now find a ray of sunlight.

In Amos 9:11, it seems as though the storm has passed and the skies are getting brighter. *"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that has fallen."* In other words, something new will begin to replace the calamity. Following the tragedy, something great will come which is the second truth we need to know.

Life with God ends in triumph.

There are some who will experience great tragedy. As Jesus said in Matthew 7:13:14, "Broad is the way that leads to destruction." Yet there will be a smaller group, a remnant, whose lives will end in triumph. They will experience, not the wrath of God, but the love of God. These are the people who heard God's warnings and turned back to Him in repentance and obedience.

So although the vast majority will experience judgment, there are good things promised for the remnant minority, things that will knock their socks off. Amos described what will happen, beginning in Amos 9:11. God will raise up the booth of David and repair its breaches. He will rebuild the cities *"...as in the days of old."* Verse 13 says, *"Behold, the days are coming..."*

Then in verses 13-15, he discussed their agriculture. He told them they would be in a perpetual time of harvest. Everything would grow so well that the planter would run into the harvester. That doesn't usually happen. Planters plant in the spring, then harvesters harvest in the fall. But in this season, the abundance will be so great that the sower and the reaper will be running into each other. The time will be so wonderful that the mountains will pour forth wine. It will be a season of great productivity and favor.

Yet we must remember that verse 13 specifically says, *"The days are coming..."* They weren't there yet. This remnant had to live in the present with the future in mind. They were living in light of a promise that had yet to be fulfilled, but it brought hope that impacted their present lives. It affected how they worshiped, how they made decisions and how they treated other people. In short, because of the promise of the future, these people would live in obedience to God.

Do you see the connection between the remnant Amos spoke of and the remnant of Christians today? Are we not a people who are living in the present with the hope of tomorrow? Are we not now ordering our lives, not for what we gain in the present moment, but because of the great future God has promised us? We have not yet experienced the promised blessings that are to come, but they motivate us to live, love, forgive, serve and give the way we do.

I do need to be honest and point out that this passage is not saying anything that clearly or simply. We might think all we can say is, "God has something in the future which is about all we can know from this text." Biblical scholars have admitted that these last verses are among the most difficult passages in Scripture to interpret. Here's the question they're asking: who gets those promises? Who gets to live the situation described in verses 11-15? There are quite a variety of positions on the answer to that. I'll give you four of the most popular interpretations, then I'll tell you my thoughts as well. After that, you're on your own in your own Bible studies.

Do we interpret this triumph specifically?

The first thing that needs to be determined is whether these promises are only for a specific group of people. One group of scholars see this is a promise to the people of Israel, that although they would soon be gobbled up by the Babylonians, that exile would only last for a certain length of time. Which is of course what the Old Testament tells us happened.

Remember Jeremiah 29? God promised the people, "I know the plans I have for you—plans to prosper you and to give you a bright future." After the 70 years Jeremiah prophesied, the people were gradually released from their exile in Babylon to go back to their homeland. They went back to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple that had been torn down. So some scholars think this is the specific interpretation of the verses in Amos 9.

Another perspective is to think it's not specifically referring to the Jewish exiles. After all, the exile wasn't the last time the people were taken over by a foreign power. In the days of Jesus, even though they were living in their own land, they were still under the rule of the harsh Roman Empire.

Some other scholars don't think the first understanding is convincing. Rather, they believe there was yet to come a future fulfillment of these promises for Israel. At some point in time, they will again be given ownership of their land. These people then generally

believe the fulfillment came in 1948, after World War II. As the Jews were fleeing the persecution of that war, the United Nations decided to rebuild the state of Israel. As a result, a couple million Jews flocked back to Israel. So these scholars see that event as the beginning of a prophecy being fulfilled before our very eyes, that God was in fact restoring the nation of Israel, never to again be uprooted.

That theology is however mixed with some significant politics. It is this interpretation of Amos that caused many of our past Presidents to promise to move the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Recently, that move has actually taken place under the leadership of President Trump. This has led many Americans to think, "If we want to be on God's side, we need to stand with Israel. We need to support and defend them, because what's happening in modern-day Israel is the fulfillment of the promised restoration of Israel."

Other scholars push back on this, referring to the phrase in Amos 9:7 where God says, "*Are not you like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel?*" The Cushites were the Egyptians. He says, "Yes, you're My people, but if you think being My people means you can do anything you want, you've got something else coming." They certainly haven't been given a get-out-of-jail-free card for anything they do.

Do we interpret this triumph spiritually?

So the first interpretation is that the prophecy was only for the nation of Israel, either past or present. The second interpretation looks at these verses as referring to spiritual things. Some scholars believe these promises will be fulfilled within the church, not in Israel. These people believe that in our day, the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people.

That phrase in verse 11, "*...I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen,*"—where did He raise that up? In Matthew 16:13:20, Jesus asked Peter, "Who do people say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then said, "You are Peter, and upon this rock, this truth, I'm going to build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It sounds as though Amos 11 was promising that the days would come when something new would rise up to replace the fallen booth. That's the second interpretation.

Do we interpret this triumph salvifically?

The third interpretation is that it has to do with salvation. In other words, it really doesn't have anything to do with Israel or with the church. It's only referring to the remnant of believers, people who are going to be restored, raised up and rebuilt through salvation. Again, this is a spiritual idea, indicating that God raises up people through salvation. Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). He came to heal the lame and give sight to the blind (Luke 7:22).

Do we interpret this triumph scripturally?

Finally, these verses can be viewed scripturally. When I say that, I'm automatically saying this is the right interpretation, but these scholars would say it's not any of the above three. Rather, they refer to the place it's quoted by James in Acts 15:16-17 where, during the Jerusalem Council, people were asking, "What should we do with these Gentiles who are having experiences with Jesus Christ? Wasn't salvation for the Jews?" James responded to them by taking words from Amos, "*After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it.*" Then James added this commentary, this interpretation: "*The remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.*" In other words, James was saying this passage in Amos was pointing to a new work God was doing, that the restoration was the bringing of the Gentiles—that is, all nations—into His Kingdom

Notice, I've put a question mark after each of these interpretations. I respect each of these positions, but let's see if we can separate the forest from the trees. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, here's a truth we need to remember: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, what God has prepared for His people" (Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9). God has promised something in the future.

So what are we to do with all these interpretations? As I look at it, I don't limit myself to any one of these positions. It's clear that God is going to do something great in the future like He spoke about through Amos. But we need to ask, "Did this promise come true in some way after the exile?" The answer is yes. "Could this also apply to Israel in the future?" The book of Revelation seems to be saying yes. There will be a future time of the outpouring of the Spirit of God such that the nation of ethnic Israel will come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Is it not true that God has used the church to rebuild things that have been destroyed? Has He not used the church to accomplish a bumper-crop harvest? The Bible says what the church is harvesting will outnumber the sands of the sea. Is that promise therefore true? It seems as though it's being fulfilled in the church. Can we not say it's being done through salvation? Can we not say that we are people whom God has called out of darkness into His marvelous light?

I don't need to hold to one particular concept. I can say the work of God has bearing in all of these ways. That tells me God is a faithful God. We must remember that life with God ends in triumph and life apart from God ends in tragedy. I don't want you to leave here being triumphant, when you should be expecting tragedy because you don't know God. But I also don't want you to think you're under His wrath when He's promised no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Life in God is proven through testing.

Determining whether or not we are living life in God comes through testing. Notice in Amos 9:9 that God says He's going to shake all people through a sieve. We use sieves in 5B's Catering to separate the boiling water from the pasta we cook. You probably have one of these at home. God is telling us the way to evaluate our lives is to pour the contents of our life into a sieve, then what remains is what is good and right. We must realize, however, that the sieve is not our good works. It's not our church attendance. It's not anything we do. The sieve God uses to shake all nations is His Son, Jesus Christ. When our life's contents are thrown into the sieve, what does Jesus keep? If Jesus keeps nothing, then our life will end in tragedy. But if there are things which, because of His work on Calvary, stay in the sieve, then we will experience triumph on that great and glorious day. Here are three things to think about in this regard.

Are we too much like the world?

First, as we test ourselves to see if we're living in the faith, are we too much like the world? In the days of Amos, that was true of Israel.

Are we listening to His Word?

The people in Amos' day were not listening. They weren't hearing the roar of the lion, so because of that, they lost the opportunity to be saved.

Are we walking in His ways?

Over and over again the book of Amos invites us to seek God and live. If you cannot answer these questions in the right way, then the only thing you have to look forward to is tragedy and great calamity. But if because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, you desire nothing more than to live these three things out, then you can say, "O glorious day when I will see my Savior face to face. I will not experience His wrath and indignation, but instead I will experience His overwhelming love, grace and mercy." On that day, my friends, we will be blown away, because the best is yet to come.

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