

Prepared to Meet God

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately exhorts all listeners to prepare their hearts to meet God by repentance, sincere worship, and embracing Christ's mercy before the inevitable divine judgment.

Scripture: Amos 4:12, Job 22:21, Revelation 3:20, Psalm 51, Psalm 42:7, Isaiah 1:18

Topics: "Divine Judgment", "Repentance", "God's Mercy"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon calls all hearers to prepare to meet God with sincere hearts and true repentance. He addresses the unconverted, the backsliders, and God's own people, urging them to cast out idols, embrace Christ's mercy, and awaken to the reality of divine judgment. Spurgeon's passionate appeal challenges formal religion and invites a heartfelt encounter with God, emphasizing both His justice and grace.

Transcript

"Therefore thus will I do unto you, O Israel: and because I will do this unto you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel." Amos 4:12.

THERE is a peculiar solemnity about the language of our text because, albeit that the whole of Scripture is the Word of God, yet very much of it is given to us by the Prophets, Apostles and other Inspired writers. But here, it is God Himself who is speaking and out of Heaven He addresses His erring people and says to them, "Because I will do this unto you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel." If ever every mortal ear should be earnestly attentive, it is when God's voice is heard. Shall not the creature listen to its Creator? Shall not man give heed to the voice of the God of the whole earth? O Lord, give to us hearing ears and let not your words merely reach our ears, but may the inward meaning of them penetrate our souls through the effectual working of Your almighty Spirit!

I am going to use the closing words of the text—"Prepare to meet your God, O Israel," as AN ADDRESS TO ALL WHO ARE NOW PRESENT.

You have come here, but for what purpose have you come? If you have come rightly, you have come to meet your God. The Israelites often came together to bow down before their engraved images, or professing to worship God with rites of their own inventing. They forgot that all true worship must be spiritual and though they did not and could not meet with God in such a way as that, yet they went back to their homes perfectly satisfied with what they had done. They had performed the external rites of their

religion. They had gone through all its ceremonies correctly and they were content. But now God calls upon them to prepare to meet HIM—no longer to be satisfied with the visible and the external, but to get to the Invisible and the Eternal—and that is the call of God to everyone who is now here present.

"What did you go out to see?" What did you come here to hear? Too many attend even the House of God with the notion of merely going to listen to the preacher. He is a thoughtful man, profound, philosophic. Or he is an eloquent man, oratorical and fluent. Is it for this reason that you go to your churches and your chapels, simply to be charmed by the voice of man? If so, let me remind you that God abhors this mockery of worship! As for myself, I have long ago despised the tricks of oratory and the gaudy displays of eloquence. I would sooner be dumb than merely speak so as to exhibit my own powers. If you have come here aright, you have come that God may meet with you and that you may meet with God—that your consciences may be awakened and that the Truth of God may enter your hearts.

O my Hearers, have you come with any such design? Are there not some of you who have almost come out to meet God as Michal went out to meet David—that she might scoff at him? Have not some of you come almost as Goliath went to defy Israel—that you may fight against God and contend against the Truth? Or, possibly, to despise it in your hearts and to mock at it? God speaks to all such persons and says to them, "Cease you from your evil ways and prepare your heart to meet ME." Oh, if we always went up to the assemblies of God's people with prepared hearts, we would not go there in vain! If sinners came up to hear the Gospel with their hearts breaking all the way, and crying from their very souls, "Oh, that we might find Christ!"—if they came up with earnest, believing prayer—if they gathered together with a sacred expectation of blessing—what meetings there would be between God and them! There would be for them no more wasted Sabbaths, no more sham profession, no more formal religion without any effect upon the conscience and the life! Then would our solemn services be streams of blessing—water would again leap out of the rock and the thirsty

congregation would indeed be refreshed! O God, will You not touch men's hearts so that when they gather together in Your House, they will come prepared to meet You there and to worship You in spirit and in truth?

II. A second application of the text which I shall make, without insisting upon its being the one designed, is this—it may be looked upon as AN ADDRESS TO GOD'S OWN PEOPLE.

Sometimes the Lord's people get out of the way of communion and fellowship with Him. It was so with Israel in the day of Amos, yet here the Lord avows Himself to still be their God, for He says, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." As for you who are His people, He is still your God and though you may have fallen into a cold condition of heart, and are now walking in darkness and seeing no light, yet He calls you to meet Him, for He desires to have your company! He has been chastening you, again and again, because you would not walk near to Him, and He is prepared to chasten you yet more. But He will stay His hand if you will now come near to Him. Remember what Eliphaz said to Job and obey the injunction, "Acquaint yourself now with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto you." Child of God, permit me to point to you with my finger and say to you, "Prepare to meet your God!" Were not those blessed times when the sound of His feet made music in your ears? Have you forgotten the Hermonites and the Hill Mizar where the Lord appeared to you and said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you"? Oh, blessed were those days when we retired to a private corner and communed with God! Hallowed was that study, that kitchen, that bedroom, that hay-loft, or that ditch under the hedge where we were accustomed to meet with the Beloved of our souls and to talk

with Him as one talks with his friends. We have had many blessed occasion when Heaven's gate has seemed to be set wide open—and if we did not pass right through, yet we did sit down as upon the doorstep of Glory and Jesus showed Himself to us—and we poured out our heart before Him! There have been times when we have received those kisses of His lips of which we love to speak even now, when the company is select, and there have been love-tokens between our soul and our Savior which have made us feel that, whether in the body or out of the body, we could hardly tell—only God knew! Then, by all your sweet recollections of the past, come, you children of the living God, and prepare to meet Him again!

If you ask, "What shall we do in order to get ready to meet Him?" I answer—Cast out the idols from your hearts! Let them all go! Love no one else and nothing else as you love Him, but give Him your whole body, soul and spirit! Humble yourself before Him at the very thought that you should ever have wandered away from Him and played the wanton towards your Best-Beloved! Come, also, with a firm reliance upon His unchanging mercy, believing that though you have often forsaken Him, He has never forsaken you. Believe in that gracious declaration of His which says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me, for I have redeemed you." Look again to the precious blood of Jesus—which is the only way of access to the Father—and come sprinkled with it even now. Why should you not come to Him at once? God has most delightful ways of blessing His people on a sudden. "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." Personally, I know what it is to rise from the depths of despair, right away from the place where I was distracted with a thousand cares, sorrows and sins and to soar straight away into the serene ether of perfect reconciliation with God and conscious fellowship with Him!

"Behold," says the risen and glorified Jesus, "I stand at the door and knock." It is at the door of Laodicea, the door of that Church which was lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, and it is at your door, O lukewarm Christian, that Christ is now knocking! What is the cure for your lukewarmness? It is Christ's standing at the door and knocking, and saying to you, "If any man hears My voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me." This will lift you up out of your lukewarmness and, instead of Christ spewing you out of His mouth, as it looks as if He must do, He will come and feast with you—and you shall feast with Him! Open your hearts to Him, now, Brothers and Sisters among us who profess to love Him! How can we keep our hearts closed against Him? "Come in, you blessed of the Lord," we cry to our Beloved and, as we gaze upon Him and see that His head is wet with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night, our hearts yearn towards Him and with heartfelt love we pray to Him, "Abide with us, O blessed Savior, and go no more out forever, but let our fellowship with You be perpetual!"

III. I should have liked, if I had had time—but I have not—to have applied this text to any professors here who have gone beyond the negative loss of communion with God—who have backslidden into sin. This is THE LORD'S ADDRESS TO BACKSLIDERS— "Prepare to meet your God." Prepare to come back into His loving arms and to be reconciled to Him again! There are some of you, perhaps, who were not only members of this Church, but who were also

members of the class so long presided over by that godly woman for whom we have hung up these memorials of our grief. [Mrs. Bartlett. She had been "called Home" during the week preceding the delivery of this sermon. (See Sermon #1249, Volume 21—Saints in Heaven and Earth One Family)] She wept over you when you turned aside. And, among the many things which have made it hard work for you to sin is this one—that you knew you were grieving her gracious and gentle spirit. Hear her voice calling to you from the grave! No, more than that, listen as she speaks to you out of the excellent Glory, saying, "My Beloved Sister, come back to your Lord!"

You have had to suffer already for your backsliding. God has sent you, as the Lord says He sent to idolatrous Israel, "blasting and mildew." He has also withheld from you the rain in a spiritual sense, so that you are near unto famishing. And there is something even worse coming upon you. God does not tell you what it is, even as He did not tell the guilty Israelites all that He would do to them—it is something so terrible that He seems to hesitate to describe it! But He says, "Because I will do this unto you." I know not what it is, nor can you guess, but it is something that will destroy all your joys and lay you prostrate in the dust of sorrow. Because He threatens to do this to you, return to Him, return to Him now! "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." I wish I could come round to each one of you backsliders and beseech you to remember that we have not ceased to love you, nor to pray for you, nor to hope that you may yet be led to prepare to meet your God!

IV. Now, coming to my principal objective on this occasion, I want to take the text and use it as A MESSAGE TO THE UNCONVERTED. O Spirit of God, apply it to them with Your almighty power!

I think the text may be applied to the unsaved in three ways. First, as a challenge—"Prepare to meet your God." Secondly, as an invitation—"Prepare to meet your God." And, thirdly, as a summons—and it will, one day, come in that form to everyone of us—"Prepare to meet your God."

First, this sentence comes to the ungodly as a challenge. At the time referred to in the text, God had been punishing the idolatrous Israelites again and again, and again, and again, with the view of bringing them to repentance. But none of His chastisements had, so far, moved them to yield to Him. The more God smote them, the harder they became, so He seemed to say to them, "Well, then, since you will not submit to Me. Since nothing appears to make you bow down at My feet, I will now put on my armor of wrath and come out against you with sword and buckler! And I throw down this challenge to you—prepare to meet Me." Now, my dear Hearers, you who have long heard the Gospel but who, until now, have rejected it, I ask you—Do you hope to be able to withstand God when He comes forth against you in the majesty of His righteous wrath? Already, when He has but touched you, He has made every bone and nerve in your body to tremble. You know how near to the gate of death He has brought you—do you imagine that when He comes out against you in His might, you will be a match for Him?

There are three things you may try to do and I will ask you whether you are prepared to meet God in reference to them. The first will be to justify yourself for remaining His enemy. Are you prepared to do that? When the Lord God says to you, "I created you, I have kept you in being, I have fed you and cared for you until now—why have you not obeyed Me?" When the Lord Jesus Christ says to you, "I loved sinners so much that I died for them—why will you not believe in Me?" And when the Spirit of God says, "I strove with men. Why did you resist Me?" What answer will you give? Will you be able to make it clear that you were perfectly justified in choosing the pleasures of this world rather than yield obedience to God? Will you be able, with all your logic, to make it seem right for you to have lived a wrong life, right to have despised the Law of God and right to have rejected the Gospel of Christ? Come, Man, Woman—set your wits to work and see whether you can expect, in the Great Assize which will soon be held, to be able to justify yourself before the bar of God! Prepare, in that way, to meet your God.

Or, secondly, do you expect to be able to resist Him? Come, you brave men, gird on your armor and come out to battle against the Lord God Almighty! Better let the thorns contend against the fire which licks them up with its flaming tongue! Better let the wax contend against the furnace heat which makes it run like water than let the sinner try to contend against the Omnipotent God! His faintest breath would suffice to scatter the ungodly and drive them like chaff before the wind. Can you stand up against the Most High, O

you that despise and forget Him? Did Pharaoh triumph over Jehovah at the Red Sea? Did Sennacherib overthrow the God of Israel on that dreadful night when his vast host was cast into a deep sleep from which there was no awakening? No—and you cannot successfully stand up against God! But if you mean to fight with Him, count the cost, understand what it means and so prepare to meet your God.

There is a third course open to you and that is, are you able to endure what He can lay upon you? I have read of a prisoner insulting the judge by whom he had been sentenced by telling him that the punishment he had awarded was a mere trifle! Can you say this to God? O unconverted men, will you be able to endure the terror of His ire in that day when He comes forth against you! Oh, no! The very joints of your body shall be loosed in that day. Your hair shall stand erect with horror! That bold spirit of yours shall despair and all you bravado with which you said, "There is no God," shall have departed from you and you will crouch, tremble, weep and wail in His Presence! You say today, "There is no Hell," but you will not say that when you get there! You defy God today, but you will not defy Him in the day when He reveals Himself to you, for then you will cry to the mountains to fall upon you to hide you from His angry face! O Sirs, the challenge of the living God is this—if you will not yield to Him, be prepared to fight the quarrel out with Him! If you will not submit to His mercy, if you cannot justify yourselves for your wrongdoing, then take up your arms and contend with Him, or harden yourselves like adamant and prepare to endure the fierceness of His wrath! But neither of these things can you do, so let that terrible challenge bring you to your knees and cause you to—

"Seek His Grace Whose wrath you cannot bear."

So, in the second place, I will use the text as an invitation. And the note at once changes from the thunders of Sinai to the still small voice of Calvary—"Prepare to meet your God." Have you heard these tidings, ungodly men? God is coming out against you, armed with His dreadful two-edged sword—that very sword of Infinite Justice with which He smote His only-begotten Son in that day when He stood as the Substitute for sinners! What can you do? Will you run away from Him? To whom or where can you run? The utmost ends of the earth are in His hands! Should you fly to the far-distant seas, He will arrest you there. Should you plunge into the thickest shades of darkness, His eyes will still behold you—

"Lord, where shall guilty souls retire, Forgotten and unknown? In Hell they meet Your dreadful fire, In Heaven Your glorious Throne. If winged with beams of morning light I fly beyond the West, Your hand, which must support my flight, Would soon betray my rest If o'er my sins I think to draw The curtains of the night, Those flaming eyes that guard Your Law Would turn the shades to light The beams of noon, the midnight hour, Are both alike to Thee— Oh, may I never provoke that power From which I cannot flee!"

God is coming forth to meet you and there is no way for you to escape from Him! Will you stay where you are? Then He will soon overtake you and when He does, then shall come your terrible end. Your wisdom is to give heed to the advice of the text and go meet Him! You cannot escape if you remain where you are, so go meet Him! "How?" you say. Well, go to meet Him thus—with humble confessions and petitions on your lips and with ropes on your necks, adjudging yourselves worthy of death and yielding yourselves up entirely into the Lord's hands. Confess that you deserve any punishment that He pleases to put upon you. It is thus that a rebellious subject should meet his King—confessing guilt, praying for mercy, pleading for forgiveness, asking for Grace. Thus David met his God. Read the 51st Psalm, note how he prayed and go and do likewise. You must also go with repentance in your hearts. The sins you have loved in the past must be hated and forsaken. You must go to God abhorring yourselves and making a full surrender of your souls to Him. Yield yourselves thus to Him and do it at once, seeing that since you have rebelled

against Him, His Justice can seize you at any moment—and execute upon you His hot displeasure!

But let me tell you that you have a stern task before you if you are to prepare yourselves in this fashion to meet your God—a task which you will find impossible to perform in your own strength! Our rebellious heart will not readily yield.

Our stubborn spirit will not easily bow. Our pride will not let us confess our sin. The dumb devil within us will not permit us to pray. I will tell you what to do. Go to God, just as you are, in the Mediator's name, or go first to Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, give me repentance. Give me faith, give me hatred of sin, give me a yielding spirit, give me a heart of flesh, give me a pliant mind." And when you have thus yielded yourself up to Jesus, you are prepared to meet God, for the place where God meets sinners is at the Cross of Christ and it is the only place where it is safe for a sinner to attempt to meet his God! If, then, you would be prepared to meet your God, go to that Jesus who met His Father on your behalf and who, as the result of that terrible meeting, died for your sins, if you are truly trusting Him. Go to Christ and He will wash you in His precious blood and clothe you in His spotless robe of righteousness! Go to Christ and He will breathe the perfume of His merits over you and then, when you meet God, He will not merely see in you a sinner, but a saved sinner! He will smell the fragrant odor of the garments of His Son which will have such a sweet savor to Him that you will be acceptable to Him for Christ's sake! There is no other way to God than this. How I wish that every unconverted person here would heed this message and obey it—"Prepare to meet your God." Go and meet Him in the way I have pointed out to you—go and meet Him this very hour.

"Where shall I go to meet God?" asks one. Well, meet Him just where you are. Trust Jesus and yield yourself to God and the great transaction is done. Or get away into some quiet corner and pour out your grief before the Lord and ask Him, for Jesus' sake, to meet with you that you may be reconciled to Him through the death of His Son.

It is scarcely a week ago since our good Sister, Mrs. Bartlett, fell asleep, and I do not know of anything that would so well keep her in our memories—especially in the memories of those of you who have often heard her loving invitations, but have not yielded to them, as for me to speak on her behalf, as well as on my Lord's behalf, and say to you, "Come and meet the Lord! Come and meet Him now, prepared to meet Him through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ your Lord." Happy day, happy day, would it be if many were led by the gracious Spirit to meet with God now! I remember well the time when I first met Him thus. I thought that I was a lost soul. I judged myself to be upon the brink of Hell. I had no merit and no native goodness to bring me to God—I was a mass of corruption and sin, but—

"I came to Jesus as I was, Weary, and worn, and sad"—

and in Jesus I met my God and, meeting God, my soul was set at liberty! And tonight my soul does magnify the Lord and my spirit does rejoice in God my Savior! The door that was open to me is open to you, my Friend, so enter it, and enter it now! May the Holy Spirit graciously enable you to come!

And, lastly, if the invitation of this text is not accepted, it will soon be heard as a summons. I am not the officer to bring the summons to you. I have no authority to do that. I am sent to invite you to meet your God and I have done that. But there will come a day, my Friends, when the authorized officer will deliver this message to you, "Prepare to meet your God." You will be sitting at the work-table, young woman, and you will feel a strange pain in your side and you will ask yourself, "What is this?" It will be a message saying to you, "Get you home to your bed, for, thus says the Lord, 'from that bed you shall come down no more till you are carried down in your coffin.' 'Prepare to meet your God.'" That message will come to you, also, my

aged Friend, before very long. You have almost completed the full period of your life and, very soon, you must retire to your room and sit still and wait, for you also must prepare to meet your God. This summons may come to me as I stand here, or to you as you sit there—it may come to the strongest young man or young woman among us. Even while we are at this service, the dart of death may reach any one of us!

What a flurry some people are in when that summons comes to them, "Prepare to meet your God!" As a rule, they have not the hardihood to put it aside. A few do, but many say, "Send for the minister, call in some praying friends and let us prepare to meet our God." They go about that solemn business in quite the wrong fashion! Their harvest is past, their summer is ended and they are not saved and, even now, they do not go the right way to be saved—they are relying upon men! They are relying upon prayers, for they have not yet learned to look alone to Jesus! I do not know any more dreary work than to be called, sometimes at dead of night, to see a dying man or woman who has lived a careless, godless life. I often feel as if it would be better to refuse to go, for, when one gets there, frequently the person is insensible and what their friends imagine we, who are ministers, can do with insensible people, is more than I can tell. Why, we cannot do much with you while you have your senses! Even while you are sitting here, much that we say glides off you like rain off the roof of your house. What can you hope that we can say to you when you are either unconscious, or distracted with

pain—with your head aching and your mind confused—and your soul amazed by the near prospect of the world to come?

God's Grace can work miracles, I know, but I fear that this miracle is seldom worked—that the man who has neglected all his life to prepare to meet his God should be able to light his lamp all of a sudden—and go forth to meet the King just when the trumpet voice is sounding through the streets, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes! Go you out to meet Him." For the most part, there is a piteous appeal, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out," but that we cannot do. And, while they go to buy for themselves, the Bridegroom comes—and when they clamor for admittance at the closed door, the answer is, "Too late! Too late! You cannot enter now." The old Rabbis used to say that every man should prepare to die one day before his death-day and, since he did not know whether he might not die tomorrow, the wisest plan was for him to prepare today. And so it is. Through this assembly, then, let this Truth of God run—that there will come a summons to death and that summons will run thus, "Prepare to meet your God."

But when you die, in an instant your soul will be before the bar of God. There will be held what I may call the petty sessions before the Last Grand Assize, but at that session your soul will stand alone and God will bid you go to the house of detention where you must wait till your body shall rise to be united with your soul! When the day of Resurrection arises, louder than ten thousand thunders will ring out the blast of the archangel's trumpet, startling Heaven and earth, and echoing over land and sea, "Awake you dead, and come to judgment!" Then shall the cemeteries heave and toss like seas when lashed into fury by the tempest! Then shall the battlefields of earth grow rich with living men as the harvest field is rich when the reaper goes forth with his sickle! Then shall earth, from her teeming womb, yield the unnumbered myriads that have slept within her bosom—and they shall stand, covering earth and sea, a countless multitude like the leaves of the forest or the sands of the seashore! Then again shall the trumpet sound o'er all the gathered throng, "Prepare to meet your God!" And HE shall come, the Man, Christ Jesus, whom they would not have to be their God and King and, sitting on the Great White Throne, with all nations before Him, "He shall separate them, one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats." And "the books" shall be opened and whoever, of all our fellow creatures and of ourselves, also, shall not be found written in the Book of Life shall be cast into the Lake of Fire!

O Sirs, O Sirs, in the name of the living God, I ask you—Are you prepared for that great day? Some of us can say, with humble boldness, "Yes, we are prepared for it." I hope that many here can truthfully say, with Count Zinzendorf—

"Jesus, Your blood and righteousness

My beauty are, my glorious dress!

Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,

With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in that great day,

For who anything to my charge shall lay?

While through Your blood absolved I am

From sin's tremendous curse and shame." But if you have not been absolved by the blood of Jesus, how can you stand there? The very light of His Countenance would scare you into abject terror! And, if His face alarms you, what will His voice do when He says, "Depart, you cursed"? And what will His hand do when He grasps His rod of iron and breaks you in pieces like a potter's wheel? Beware, you that forget God, lest you loiter and linger and procrastinate until that last trumpet summons sounds, "Prepare to meet your God." May He graciously grant that you may be prepared now, instead of standing unprepared in that dread day!—

"You sinners, seek His Grace, Whose wrath you cannot bear! Fly to the shelter of His Cross, And find salvation there!"

Crouch at His feet! Bow down before those dear feet that were nailed to the Cross! Look up to the hands that still bear the nail prints! Gaze upon the face that once was stained with spittle, but now shines beyond the light of the sun! Look upward to that brow which once was crowned with thorns! Hide yourself in that cleft in His side where the spear made an open way to the heart of Jesus! In a sentence, rest in His atoning Sacrifice, for there is nothing else in which you can rest! May the Lord enable you to do so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: AMOS5:4-27.

Verse 4. For thus says the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek you Me, and you shall live. And that is just the message of God to professing Christians now—"Seek you Me." Get away from your mere ceremonies, from trusting in your outward performances—and get to God Himself. Get beyond your fellow worshippers and your ministers, beyond your sanctuaries and your supposed holy places—and get in spirit and in truth to God Himself! "Seek you Me, and you shall live."

5. But seek not Beth-el, nor enter into Gilgal and pass not to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nothing. These were the places where the calves and other idols were set up for the worship of God by means of visible symbols. That was the Romanism of that day. Pure spiritual worship was ordained by God, but that was not enough for the idolatrous Israelites. They must set up the image of an ox, the emblem of power—not that they would worship the ox, they said, but that they might worship the God of Power through that symbol. And that is the plea of Papists today—"We do not

worship that cross. We do not worship that image. These things help us! They are emblems." But they are absolutely forbidden by God—"You shall not make unto you any engraved image, or any likeness of anything that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them." The First Commandment forbids us to have any other God than Jehovah. The Second forbids us to worship Him through any emblem or symbol whatever.

6, 7. Seek the LORD, and you shall live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el. You who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth. Here you have another great Truth of God—that in order to seek God aright, we must turn away from sin. All the Ritualism in the world will not save us, or be acceptable to God! There must be purity of life and holiness of character. Justice must be done between man and man, and we must seek to be right before the righteous and holy God.

8. Seek Him that makes the seven stars and Orion. The Creator of the spring-bringing Pleiades and of the winter-bringing Orion.

8, 9. And turns the shadow of death into the morning, and makes the day dark with night: that calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is His name that strengthens the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress. The God of the weak, the Defender of the oppressed! You that oppress the poor and tread down the people, seek you Him and wash your hands from the stains of your past injustice!

10. They hate him that rebukes in the gate, and they abhor him that speaks uprightly. There is still a generation that cannot bear to be told of its faults—and it shows its venom against everything that is right.

11. Forasmuch, therefore, as your treading is upon the poor, and you take from him burdens of wheat you have built houses of hewn stone but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine of them. God has often shown how He can overthrow those who oppress the poor!

12-17. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their rights. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time, for it is an evil time. Seek good, and not evil, that you may live: and so the LORD, the God of Hosts, shall be with you, as you have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of Hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. Therefore the LORD, the God of Hosts, the Lord says thus, Wailing shall be in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, Alas, alas, and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skillful of lamentation to wailing. And in all vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through you, says the LORD. National sins bring down national judgments and when God grows angry against the people, He makes the places of their feasting, the vineyards where their choicest vines grow, to become the places of their sorrow, so that wailing and distress are heard on all sides. Oh, that nations knew the day of their visitation and would do justly! Then would such judgments be averted.

18. Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! To what end is it for you? The day of the LORD is darkness, and not light. "The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light," for such as you impenitent, unjust, graceless sinners. "The day of the Lord" will not bring blessings to you! It will be—

19. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. From bad to worse do they go who think to escape from present misery by plunging into the Presence of God. The suicide is, of all fools, the greatest, for he goes before God with his own indictments. No, with his own sentence in his hand. He needs no trial—he has condemned himself!

20-22. Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? Even very dark, and no brightness in it. I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your solemn assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept these: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. See how God speaks about public worship and formal sacrifices when the heart is not right with Him? When the moral conduct of the offerer is wrong, the Lord will not accept his offering.

23, 24. Take you away from Me the noise of your songs; for I will not hear the melody of your viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. This is what God asks for—righteousness, not sweet music! Have they not, at this very day, turned what were once houses of prayer into music halls, set up their idols in our parish churches and adorned their priests with every kind of Babylonian garment which they could find at Rome, the mystical Babylon? Are they not turning this nation back again to that accursed Popery, the yoke of which our fathers could not bear? Therefore, the Lord is angry with this land! There are storm clouds gathering over it because it is not sufficiently stirred with indignation against those idolatrous men who are again seeking to come to the front among us!

25. Have you offered unto Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? "Did you worship Me? Did you offer sacrifices to Me?" "No," said God, "you did not."

26, 27. But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which you made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, says the LORD, whose name is The God of Hosts. Oh, for pure worship! Oh, for pure living! Oh, for hearts that spiritually worship the Lord, for Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship Him." "But unto the wicked, God says, What have you to do to declare My statutes, or that you should take My Covenant in your mouth?"

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