



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Amos 3:3-8

“Our Personal Interim of Grace”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] First let me explain that you can see that Howard and I had not had a time to get together and discuss the Wednesday night. It is not really the beginning of a series, Howard, but simply this coming Wednesday night we are going to have a biblical question and answer hour. And we'll devote our one hour, seven thirty to eight thirty, to answering your questions concerning things biblical. But, of course, if you want to ask questions about politics, social concerns, economic principles and matters or foreign affairs or almost anything that you may have in your mind. We also will take all scientific questions that have to do with not only biblical matters but matters of the space program and various other types of things. We're willing to hear all of your questions. We're not promising, of course, any answers. You'll notice it's a question and answer program, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the answers fit the questions. [Laughter] But we will be open to all of your questions and I hope that Howard, who'll be doing most of the answering of the questions, will be honest enough to say I don't know when he doesn't know the answer to a question. But he's rather slippery and like most professors and knows how to give you the impression for the moment that your question has been answered until you reflect upon it a bit, and you realize that you have been had. [Laughter] At any rate, we are having a question and answer program, and, I know some

of you do have some questions. We’ve given a long series, for example, on the purpose of the ages and I know there are questions concerning that but any other biblical questions we will entertain your questions on Wednesday night. We will not, of course, promise that we will be able to answer them all.

I’d like to say just a word of appreciation for me, and I’m sure I speak for the elders although it’s possible that the decorations outside the chapel and the landscape have been done so long ago that the elders have already expressed thanks to you, but for me and for Martha I would like to say that we really appreciate what the deacons and the others have done in making the Chapel look a bit more festive as it ought to be this fall. We’re very appreciative. It was the first thing that I noted when I came over here Monday or Tuesday morning and saw what had taken place out here. But, at any rate, I am grateful, and I’d like to express my appreciation to all who had a part just as an individual. I started to thank Bob Reese because I know that he had been concerned but he was careful to point out to me just a moment ago that many of you worked in planting the chrysanthemums and others. And, of course, you understand that once having planted the chrysanthemums, that means you have to take care of them. [Laughter]

So that means this wintertime you’ll have to pull up the inside, which becomes difficult to handle. You’ll have to take it up. You’ll have to take the little shoots off and replant them and it means also you’ll have to prune them at the proper times in the spring and through the summer so that next fall we can have the same thing. It’s just a matter of finishing what you have begun because that’s a biblical principle, you know, being confident of this very thing that he which had begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ. So it’s a Christian thing to keep after those chrysanthemums as long as you have put them in the ground. [Laughter] I can see now the deacons are already thinking how much does it cost to replant the whole thing the next time. [Laughter] Okay that’s satisfactory too.

Now, we’re going to turn to Amos chapter 3, verse 3 through verse 8, and we’re going to read this section for our Scripture reading. Amos chapter 3, verse 3 through verse 8, and our subject for today is “Our Personal Interim of Grace.” The prophet writes, having just in the previous verse written.

“You only have me among all the families of the earth, therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Continues, “Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment? Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured something? Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?”

Incidentally, it’s obvious that Amos has never tried to fix a rat or a mousetrap because very often those traps do jump up with nothing in them except possibly your finger. But the point Amos makes is very plain. He continues,

“If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it? Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret counsel To His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. We bow now together for a moment of prayer.

As I said at the 8:30 service, if I do not speak with the same mellifluous sounds that usually characterize my voice it’s because we have a new mic and I just read the instructions just then after having used it at the 8:30 hour. If you like it, let them know. It doesn’t belong to us yet. So the words on the side of it say.

We are turning to Amos chapter 3, verse 3 through verse 8 and the subject for today as I mentioned earlier is “Our Personal Interim of Grace.” Perhaps it would be good for just a moment to make a few comments by way of review. You remember that Amos in the opening chapter of his particular prophecy states that he labored during the days of Ahaziah king of Judah. Remember that Amos was from Judah and in the days of Jeroboam son Joash king of Israel two years before the earthquake. So Amos’s day was a day of prosperity and affluence. It was a day also as the prophecy reveals of exploitation on the part of important and influential people in the land and it was a day of religion.

Now, it doesn’t take any reflection at all to realize that in many ways we live in a similar day. We, certainly, in the United States of America are one of the countries most characterized by affluence. We also have considerable exploitation in this country. And further, we are a country filled all of the trappings of religion. So Amos’s day, while quite different because of the age in which he ministered, is still a day in which we have the same types of things that we have in the United States today. “Israel,” one of the commentators has said, “Was prosperous pious and pitiless.” I don’t think it’s really fair to the United States of America to say that this is a pitiless country. It, probably, of all the countries upon the earth of any particular influence has been more compassionate toward those who do not have the things that we have and at the same time in spite of that we do have exploitation in our country. Amos’s message is perhaps the oldest volume of sermons that we have.

Now, there is some question about that, but many contemporary scholars and students of the Book of Amos feel that what we have in the Book of Amos is a collection of messages that he preached as a prophet in the northern kingdom. If that is so, this is the oldest volume of Christian sermons. I use Christian in the sense of biblical sermons extent. And the prophet of justice, as Amos is probably properly called, prophesied the end of Israel in disciplinary judgment. Listen to what he says in the 8th chapter in the 2nd verse and he said, “He said, ‘What do you see, Amos?’ And I said, ‘A basket of

summer fruit.’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘The end has come for My people, Israel, I will spare them no longer.’” Then in the very next chapter in the 8th verse we read Amos prophesying as a result of the vision that he has received, “Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,’ declares the Lord.” So as he says in verse 2 of the 1st chapter, “The Lord is roaring from Zion.”

Now, the figure of the lion is very proper. In fact, as one reflects upon the kind of life that people lived in those days, you can understand why the lion was used as a figure of the Lord God because having the concept of the universe that they had, largely a simple concept derived from the truths set forth in the Pentateuch concerning the creation, when the men of Amos’s day heard the thunder and the lightning in the skies above and reflected upon that fact, it was easy to see how they came to think of the Lord as a lion. Thunder sounds a bit like the roar of the lion or at least the growl of a lion.

And so, consequently, the thunder that characterized their day as well as ours suggested to them the voice of the Lord. And so in order to give emphasis to that particular metaphor, we find the Lord in the Old Testament, not simply in the prophecy of Amos but in other prophecies as well, looked at as a lion. And so Amos’s message as he states it in the very 1st chapter the second verse is, “The Lord is roaring from Zion.” In the 3rd chapter, he also states this again. But in the 3rd chapter there is a slight difference in the sense that the tense or state of the Hebrew verb is different. In the 8th verse of the 3rd chapter, he writes, “A lion has roared who will not fear the Lord God has spoken who can but prophesy.”

Amos’s structure is very simple. He has eight judgments addressed to the nations round about the northern kingdom and finally concludes with the northern kingdom. Like any good preacher he sets out the application of the truth to others and then lest you think that he’s going to avoid the application of the truth to us at the end of his series of judgments he deals with the nation Israel or the northern kingdom. Then there follow

three discourses of doom in chapter 3, chapter 4, chapter 5 each which begins with the expression, “Hear this word which the Lord has spoken.” Chapter 4, verse 1, “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan.” Chapter 5, “Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel.” So eight judgments followed by three discourse of doom and then in chapter 7 through 9, we have visions that Amos has been given. Five of them are set forth there. So as you continue your reading of the Book of Amos and I hope you will, if you’ll just think about those eight judgments, the three discourses of doom, and the five visions, and that will give you some structure by which to read the content of Amos’s prophecy.

The eight judgments, we tried to point out, were carefully structured. They were in a sense a role call of the nations surrounding the nation Israel and they raised a couple of questions. If you were thinking about them in the light of the way in which the Old Testament has taught biblical truth to this point, you would have had a couple of questions. One of the questions would have been this one. Is Israel’s election just plain favoritism? For after all in verse 2 of chapter 3, the prophet has stated “You only have I known of all the nations upon the earth.” So it’s obvious that Israel is the object of the distinguishing electing covenantal love of the Lord God.

Now, the natural response of the natural man to divine election in this way of distinguishing grace is to think that this is unfair favoritism. So Amos goes on to point out immediately after saying, “You only have I known among all the families of the earth, therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Judgment begins, Peter tells us, “At the house of God.” So we are rejoicing over divine election. It’s sovereign election election in distinguishing grace, covenantal love. Let us remember that the position into which the Lord God has brought us is a marvelous position but it also exposes us to divine discipline and divine judgment. So may the Lord help us to remember that we, because of the blessings that we have, should be especially people who walk humbly before the Lord God. That’s the first question and it’s clear that Amos has guarded the

truth against misrepresentation by adding immediately, “Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

The other question, which no doubt was often raised as one reads through Amos, it’s clear it was raised in the northern kingdom, is what right does Amos have to say these things? After all, he is come in to the northern kingdom from the south. He’s a southerner speaking to those Yankees up north, and he’s not even one of them. And, yet, at the same time he is accusing them of ways in which they have rebelled against the word of God. What right does this herdsman, this nipper of sycamore figs, have to speak to us as he has spoken to us. And so Amos in this section, as well as in another important section in the 7th chapter, will point out the justification for his speaking as he speaks. He will defend his commission and that is precisely what he is going to do right here. So the theme of the section that we’re looking at is Amos speaks because God has spoken.

Now, one cannot help but be mindful of the Apostle Paul when you read something like this. Here is a man of God who says, “A lion has roared who will not fear the Lord God has spoken who can but prophesy.” Surely, the Lord God does nothing unless he reveals his secret counsel to his servants the prophets, and he’s taking that position and affirming that God has spoken to him and he’s giving the words of God. Paul spoke about the fact that in his ministry he was under compulsion to speak as he spoke and, in fact, he said, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.” That same sense of divine motivation and divine necessity is that which grips all true ministers of the word of God. The sense that we must speak because God has spoken, not because any prophet or any apostle or any other simple preacher or teacher of the word of God in Sunday school has the right by position to speak in a special way, he speaks only because God has spoken to him and is speaking through him, and it is the Lord God who is speaking, ultimately, not the individual.

Now, Amos can talk about the fact that he is speaking. He will say in verse , “The words of Amos, who was among the sheppard shepherders from Tacoah.” But then having said that particular fact, which was true, he was uttering those words then he says, “The Lord roars from Zion thus says the Lord,” and points out that his whole message is really a message given to him by the Lord God.

Now, then if that’s our subject Amos speaks because God has spoken. He’s defending his ministry. Let’s look at the way that he does it. And first of all, we’ll note what students of Amos have called his dispute saying. That is it’s a saying that arises out of the fact that he’s disputing with those who are objecting to his preaching to them authoritatively. Chapter 3, verse 3 through verse 6, Amos says, “Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment? Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured something? Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all? If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?”

Now, the setting, of course, is a hostile encounter between the prophet and the people not surprising because it’s always like that. Even in the beginning of the Christian era after the apostles have just passed off the scene we have individuals immediately who are subjected to the rebellious attacks of the unbelieving. Even Ignacious who was martyred in 117 AD not long after the Apostle John had died. Ignacious is martyred because of objections to the word of God. When we come on to those days just preceding the reformation, we have men like John Huss who lived in the latter fourteenth and the early part of the 15th Century, one of those who anticipated much of the reformation under Luther and Calvin, who was attacked by the church leaders of his day and finally burned at the stake. And then there is no need to talk about Calvin and Geneva and the bitter experiences that that great teacher of the word of God in his own ministry.

Or of John Knox, one of his disciples who was in and out of Scotland as is he were an airline pilot flying in and out, because if Mary Queen of Scots had authority he was best out if she didn’t he was in as if he possibly could be and finally by virtue of grit and determination, ultimately, was the leading figure in the establishment of the Protestant reformation in the land of Scotland. And then others as well, I say, Luther, we all know the story of Luther and the problems Luther had because of his desire to proclaim justification by grace through faith. Jonathan Edwards in this country perhaps the greatest mind that we have ever produced in the United States of America if we can use that term forced out of his little church because of his convictions concerning the teaching of the word of God. So the history of the response of us men and woman to the word of God is not good. We have rebelled against the truth. We have rebelled against the word of God. We have rebelled against who have preached the word of God freely and faithfully. And Amos is one of a magnificent line of men who are called God’s servants, the prophets.

The seven questions that I just read are questions that the prophet puts very deftly. I think they are put very deftly because he was given them by the Lord God. He asks about relations between an event and its cause and he seeks, as you can tell from these questions, to illicit an answer “Yes that’s true.” He says, “Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?” Well, that’s true. “Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?” No, that’s true because the lion keeps absolutely quiet until finally the prey has come within the range of the lion and then the lion roars with his roar and the poor animal is so terrified the body is paralyzed with fear and thus destroyed by the lion. “Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured something?” So after he’s destroyed his prey he drags it off to his lair and their growls in enjoyment over the meal that he has from the animal that he has taken.

So here are questions that are beautifully put and they in one sense are questions in which we have an event and then its cause. In verses 3 through 5 we have the event

expressed and then the cause. And then in verse 6 the first line we have the cause then the event but in the latter part of verse 6 we have the event again and then cause. And all of this, I say, designed to bring an individual who is listening to them to say, “He’s right.” There are folk sayings, that is there are sayings that Amos by the Holy Spirit’s directions has formulated from his own experience. He knew what it was on those bare hills of the northern kingdom to see a couple of people walking together, it was unusual to see them on the hills. He also knew about the lions and the other things that are described here, the trapping of birds. Those were things that characterized the life about Amos, and using them he made his defense of himself. In a sense, this is a kind of window on Amos’s life in Tacoah.

Now, I like what Amos has done because it reflects so much of modern life. What he’s trying to do you see is to get you to say yes he’s speaking the truth. Now, if you’ve ever been a salesman you know that one of the psychological gimmicks of good salesmen is to ask such questions that you never say no. That is they want to get you into the pattern of saying yes. So a couple days ago I had somebody call me on the phone from Agape. As far as I know, it’s a nice organization. I occasionally buy some things from them. They called back wanted me to buy some more.

Now, if I were a salesman like that I would want to have them answer, yes. For example, I might hear a knock on my door and I go out and it’s a nice looking young man and he would say first of all, “Mr. Johnson it’s a lovely day isn’t it?” “Yes it is.” “You have a lovely yard out here with these four magnificent oak trees.” “Well, yes I do like those oak trees.” “You know, in the fall when all of those leaves fall on the ground, it’s a lot of work to get them up.” “Yes that’s true.” “And wouldn’t it be nice to have a yard in which you have no leaves though you had all of these leaves fall.” “Well, yes that’s right.” “Would you like to buy some leaf bags?” [Laughter] And, of course, I’ve already said yes four times and so I have to say, “Well yes, I guess so.” Fortunately he didn’t ask me those four questions on Friday and I said wait I’ll go back and see if I have some and I had

some leftover and so I could come back and say no. But, nevertheless, salesmen like to get you in the pattern of saying yes.

Now, incidentally if any of you salesman out here didn’t know that and you go out this week and you make a few sales remember my commission. [Laughter] But anyway, that’s what Amos is trying to do. He is trying to get his audience into the pattern but he’s deft. I say deft because I think it’s a marvelous little way that Amos has put these things together. Now, mind you my view of divine inspiration is that the men who wrote the word of God by the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit were not typewriters or as we would say were not computers but they were men. And Amos was never more than a man when he was putting together the things that God was giving him by divine inspiration. So the Scripture and Amos his own prophecy can be the words of Amos but at the same time the Lord speaking. And so Amos thought this through under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and he has given to us the word of God. Never as much a man as when he wrote this but the words themselves never more the word of God ever then they are here the precise word of God.

Now, of course, they’re all pretty simple. We can pass over most of them until we come to the final statement in verse 6, “If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?” The term *ra’ab* which is translated in my version, The New American Standard Bible by Calamaty is a term that can mean evil and in the Authorized Version that’s the rendering evil. As a result of that particular rendering it has sometimes been claimed that the prophet’s language is the kind of language that suggests that God is the author of evil.

Now, aside from that question which all Christian theologians so far as I know have always denied, God is not the author of evil. The term *ra’ab* which is often given the sense properly of evil is many, many times given the proper sense of calamity. That is an evil is something that has happened that is destructive and that’s the sense here. And the translators of the New American Standard Bible, I think, have been eminently correct

in saying “If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it.” Well, what about the statement though “Has not the Lord done it.” In English law as well know the killing of a person by lightning is termed an act of God, even though we ourselves are not qualified to form a judgment as to the divine reason for the infliction of the calamity.

John Calvin has commented on the last part of this verse in this way.

“Unexpectedly indeed calamity comes and it’s commonly ascribed to chance, but the prophet here reminds us that God stretches his nets in which men are caught. Though they think that chance rules and observe not the hand of God. They are deceived for the bird foresees not the ensnaring prepared for him but yet he falls not on the earth without fowler.” In other words, the bird is not able to see that there is somebody down there with a trap who is going to get him. He doesn’t foresee that but, nevertheless, when he falls to the ground in the trap it’s because of the trapper, the fowler. “For nets weave not themselves by chance but they are made by the industry of the man who catches birds.” So also calamities do not happen by chance but proceed from the secret purposes of God.

Now, there can be no objection to that. That is nothing more than the expression of the providence of God and so if a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it in the sense that ultimately the things that happen, happen by virtue of the secret purposes of God. John Calvin goes on to caution that we must not press the similitude too far so as to lead any to think that God leads men to commit evil. The point is that he catches men who do commit evil. So then this is the prophet’s dispute saying composed of these six lines. We’ll come back to that in a moment.

Next notice the 7th verse and here the prophet makes the dogmatic assertion of the fact that he belongs among God’s servants the prophets. The prophet is the semiquanone of divine action. Listen, “Surely, the Lord does nothing unless he reveals his secret council to his servants the prophets.” So the effect is what God does. The cause of it is God’s revelation to the prophets. What Amos is saying is that there is a divine methodology. He makes known from his godly men what is going to come to pass. In

fact, that word translated secret council here the Hebrew *cowd* is a word that suggests intimacy that comes from friendly confidential speech.

And in one of the passages of the Old Testament, there is some indication the prophet Michaiah is one who makes reference to it that in a sense the prophets of the Old Testament were ushered into a kind of consultative assembly of heaven as probably their way of expressing that they were invited to understand the secret councils of the Lord God. In other words, God gave instruction ahead of time for the things that were going to happen. And so he says, “Surely, the Lord God does nothing unless he reveals his secret council to his servants the prophets.” If you’re interested in looking that up, read Jeremiah chapter 23 for further information. The heavenly council guarantees that actions shall follow his words.

Vilhausen, one of the students of the Old Testaments that all evangelicals get nervous when they read, said one or two true things in the midst of the lot of heresy. He called the prophets “God’s storm birds.” Now, that’s not bad because what he was saying was it’s the prophets who let the people know about the storms that are to come. And so Amos and others spoke to the needs of the day in the light of the future. In fact, by the way, that is the great problem in evangelicalism and also in liberalism today. They tell us to speak to the needs of the day but they speak to the needs of today in the light of today and, consequently, their needs that they speak about have no real force behind them because it’s nothing more than either good or bad human reason.

But the prophets spoke to the needs of the day. They were relevant to their day in the light of what was to come. If our liberal friends were talking about the needs of the day, social, whatever, in the light of the fact that we were heading for divine judgment in the second coming of Christ and the events that follow that then we could listen to them. But when they speak to us of the needs today in the light of today, well you’ll pardon me if I don’t pay as much attention to them as I might if they spoke in the light of what the word of God says the future holds for us. So in the case of Amos, he speaks as

is clear to the needs of the day. He was very relevant but he spoke to those needs in the light of the future judgments that were going to be poured out upon Israel and the nations about them.

Well, finally, in verse 8 there is a factual appeal on the part of the prophet. “A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” This is the climax of the sequence. The lion has roared. Israel knows the meaning of the lion’s roar. They know the downward flight of a bird in toward the trap. They know about the springing of the trap, but Israel, unfortunately, is a people that is ignorant of the significance of the prophet in their midst. Nothing could be more damaging to the future welfare of Israel than to fail to recognize that Amos and others were prophets in their midst and God was speaking to them through those prophets.

In fact, today nothing can be more damaging to the future of the United States of America than to fail to realize that God has men of God all over this land who are constantly preaching the truth of the word of God. And we in Believers Chapel, we need to constantly remember that we have in our company, I don’t mean in our little company, I’m not claiming to be one of the prophets incidentally, I don’t think there are any prophets today in this sense. There are ministers of the word of God. There are men who handle the word of God, but what I mean is this that we in Believers Chapel we need to pay attention to the things that God has said in his word, and the things that he is teaching us through his men whom he has called to minister the word of God. This statement in verse 8 is a statement in the Hebrew text in which the lines are short and very concise and in many people’s minds have created an impression that Amos responded to God’s call in fear and dread. Ariy sha’ag mi lo’ yare’ adono adonai dabar mi lo’ ynovih dabar. Very short concise little clauses, and it’s almost as if Amos himself is in awe over the way in which God has spoken to him. “The lion has roared who will not fear. The Lord God has spoken who can but prophesy.”

Now, as I close, I’d like to say just a couple things that I think are very important. One can see from this that there is a before and an after to everything in life. Amos has been talking about events and then he’s looking at the causes. There is a time of opportunity. There is a time of possibility. There is a time of potential and then there is a time of impossibility a time of regret a time of failure. There is a time in which we say I must do this. I ought to do this. I have time to do this and then there’s a time, I’m in that stage of life in so many ways, there is a time which we say I would have liked to have done this but I cannot do it now. There is a time of fading opportunity and there is time of lost opportunity.

In other words, there is a before and an after to everything in life. That’s the story of these dispute sayings. He says, “Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey.” That, of course, is the before. “Does a young lion growl from his den unless he’s captured something?” That’s the after. “Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it?” In other words, there is an invitation to take the bait, before. “Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?” Ah, that’s too late when the trap springs. “If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people tremble?” Before. “If a calamity has occurred in a city has not the Lord done it?” That’s after.

Now, I want you to notice something that in verse 4, verse 5, verse 6, there are double lines before and after, but in verse 3 we have only a before. Did you notice that when you were reading as you were reading? You only, well verse 3, “Do two men walk together unless they’ve made an appointment?” And then you expect another line because all of the others are double lines, but that one is a single line. Commentators have noticed this, and so they are inclined to want to supply what is set forth there. In fact, one of the better commentators has said what Amos is suggesting it seems to him is, do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment, the Lord God and Israel have entered into covenantal arrangement therefore they are walking together.

In fact, that’s exactly how Jeremiah described those early days when God in his covenantal love called them out of the land and they walked together. Jeremiah describes it that we’re using the same word incidentally that is used here the verb *balak*. But then he suggests the last line which is not given would be something like this. Can a marriage be restored if the certificate of divorce has been written? The before. Do two men walk together unless they have an appointment? After. Can a marriage be restored if the certificate of divorce has been written? Because the remainder of the book of Amos will tell us how God is going to break the covenant for the nation except for those that he mentions not entirely with the house of Jacob. In other words, that generation is going to suffer the consequences of God’s activity of divine discipline. So it’s clear that since the prophet, it seems to me, since the prophet did not give us, “Can a marriage be restored if the certificate of divorce has been written?” He’s leaving one last opportunity for Israel to respond. This is an interim of grace period of time for them.

You know when I go on a vacation one of the things I like to do is to take a few books that are not theological books and read them. I read about three mystery novels. I like spy stories and I take the side of the Americans against the Russians. Does that surprise you? But at any rate, I was reading one when I was on the vacation it’s called it’s by John Lacharae, and it’s entitled “The Little Drummer Girl.” And I don’t usually get very much spiritual help from these books. I confess I put my mind in neutral and then rest really reading these books. I read three of them on this trip. But there was one comment in Mr. Lacharae’s book “The Little Drummer Girl” that really has stuck with me. It was something, I’m embarrassed to confess having preached the Gospel for forty years, I never put it this way.

But he said he had one of his characters saying this with a twinkle in his eye. “We live for such a short time and we are far too long dead.” That impressed me. We live for such a short time and we are far too long dead. As a matter of fact, we are physically dead in that sense apart from the resurrection. We are physically dead in the

sense in which we live now, forever. Therefore, this interim of grace in which we live is of the greatest importance. So Amos speaks and he offers by the grace of God an interim of grace. The absence of the query can a marriage be restored leaves the matter open. The arrangement is threatened unless action is taken the discipline must come. The roar will become the growl of the prey who has been taken and eaten.

We live in just such an age. We live in just such a society. God, the Lord God, has roared. The judgment is all set out in great detail in the word of God. It’s coming. We live in an interim of grace. The growl of the taking of the captive animals, peoples in this sense, is not yet heard but we may escape by turning to the Lord God.

May I read something to you and I’ll close with this I promise. This is something that I think is so true of our country. It’s true of the church. It’s true of Believers Chapel. This commentator, a very good one, says, “Consider the church in Amos’s day.” Now, he means the Nation Israel. “It was desperately needy and though all unconscious of the fact was threatened by the imminent displeasure of its God. It lacked true knowledge. It lacked true spirituality. It lacked true repentance. It was full of corruption. It had departed from the truth. It was proud, complacent, and self satisfied. It set itself on a pedestal and despised the world. It could produce all the evidence which today makes people cry out to God for revival being convinced that nothing can stop this rot and rebuild the ruins but some overmastering spiritual effusion from on high which will bring the faithful remnant into proper trim for service, cast the unbeliever down in a deep sense of the incurable guiltiness of sin, and say to the world that there is a God who lives and reigns.”

What, however, did God do? He sent a man who had been in fellowship to preach his word. We cannot be Amoses. We cannot be Pauls. We can only be what we are, but it is obvious that we live in a day in which, personally, is a day of interim of an interim of grace, what we might be what we might turn out to be. May the Lord help us as believing Christians to take advantage of interim of grace. And if you’re in the

audience and you have not yet believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, we warn you of the judgment that is to come, and that there is marvelous deliverance and forgiveness of sins and justification of life in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who has offered an atoning sacrifice that is sufficient for the sins of the world. May God in his marvelous grace touch your heart with your sin, may he bring home to you the peril of your condition, and may you flee to Christ and receive forgiveness of sins and rejoice in him. That’s our prayer. That’s our earnest admonition as an ambassador of our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Trust in him. Receive the gift of eternal life.

May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father we are so grateful to Thee for these marvelous words that thou didst give to Amos, the faithful man. Help us, Lord, to respond properly to them. Deliver us from the lethargy and indifference, the sin and disobedience that so often characterizes us. May, O God, we put by Thy grace our priorities right and remember that all that we do is secondary to that relationship to that Thee and the service of Thee which thou dost desire.

For Jesus sake. Amen.