

I want to show you a picture and you can tell me what it's about – of Cecil the Lion in Zimbabwe

Killed by a dentist Walter Palmer from Minnesota – all over the media; social media storm; politicians involved

The country's The Chronicle newspaper published: "It is not an overstatement that almost 99,99 percent of Zimbabweans didn't know about this animal until Monday. Now we have just learnt, thanks to the British media, that we had Africa's most famous lion all along, an icon!"

Raised issues – hunting; protecting animals; social media; social responsibility; perspective – he is in hiding, his business is ruined – all this in a country where fewer people responded to the shooting in a church than the killing of a lion in another country.

Today thousands of people will die because: preventable diseases are not treated because of indifference, corruption and big business holding people to ransom over the price of medicines; thousands in Calais are desperately trying to find a new life in the UK; many more thousands are refugees in other countries; ISIS will end the lives of people because of their faith; some present and former politicians will walk freely on the streets of our country despite having committed fraud or sexual offences and as a society we reward sportsmen and women, actors, entertainers, singers and nobodies with obscene amounts of money – there are issues that should get people worked up but I think the response to Cecil the lion has been totally disproportionate.

Another lion was killed 2000 years ago but came back to life. This lion - the Lion of Judah spoke to Amos with a message for the Israelites and we need to hear that message today.

Amos 7 has three visions that speak of God's coming judgement – swarms of locusts stripping the land clean; then fire drying up the sea and devouring the land; lastly God standing at a wall with a plumb line with which he was going to test the 'trueness' of his people. Let's be honest this offends our modern sensibilities. We read the Old Testament and think, "God is a horrible bully." Met a man on holiday who told me that he didn't like the God of the OT and wasn't keen on the one in the NT. Wouldn't have been surprising except that we were in church at the time! It's a common attitude.

What's the problem? We begin with our opinion and find the problems because we try to make God fit our understanding.

We are supposed to begin with the Word of God and bend our opinions to it, studying the original – the revealed word.

The problem is we have lost the understanding of just how serious sin is.

With that gone we cannot arrive at an accurate picture of justice.

Genesis 2:16

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Notice how we are wired for the law. Pre-fall that is all we needed; just obey the one law!

The promise was DEATH – now.

Open treason against God is JUSTLY punished by death.

Try that anywhere on earth – tell the reigning authority that you will not serve it, that you will go your own way – try telling our government that you don't recognise their authority and that where your ideas and their laws disagree you're going to do what you want. Try going to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, China or North Korea and do that! Yet that is what we want to do with God.

This has never really been a Christian country – in that there has not been a time when the majority were believing people - but it has been a country which has been significantly affected by people who have put their faith into action. That was not always appreciated but it was generally accepted that faith and the church had a significant public role. The same does not hold true today and the efforts to remove the influence of the church and people of faith has resulted in increasing societal breakdown and inequality. We'll think a bit more about that next week because it's not a new problem – it happened in the days of Amos as well.

Ezekiel 18:25 You people of Israel accuse me of being unfair! But listen—I'm not unfair; you are! 26 If good people start doing evil, they must be put to death, because they have sinned. 27 And if wicked people start doing right, they will save themselves from punishment. 28 They will think about what they've done and stop sinning, and so they won't be put to death. 29 But you still say that I am unfair. You are the ones who have done wrong and are unfair!

God has set his standard – the Law. People knew what was expected, didn't do it and then complained that God was being unfair.

30 I will judge each of you for what you've done. So stop sinning, or else you will certainly be punished. 31 Give up your evil ways and start thinking pure thoughts. And be faithful to me! Do you really want to be put to death for your sins? 32 I, the Lord God, don't want to see that happen to anyone. So stop sinning and live!

When we start with our understanding and our expectations of what is right or fair we are starting from the wrong place. We need to start with what God says. In the OT God used one nation to bring judgement against another: many of the people who lived in the promised land were descendants of Abraham who had turned from God, so God used Joshua and the Israelites to bring judgement on them –

Genesis 15:13-16 *Abram, you will live to an old age and die in peace.*

But I solemnly promise that your descendants will live as foreigners in a land that doesn't belong to them. They will be forced into slavery and abused for four hundred

years. But I will terribly punish the nation that enslaves them, and they will leave with many possessions.

16 Four generations later, your descendants will return here and take this land, because only then will the people who live here be so sinful that they deserve to be punished.

God gave them 400 years to repent but they wouldn't.
In the NT God's judgement is also significant:

Romans 2 Some of you accuse others of doing wrong. But there is no excuse for what you do. When you judge others, you condemn yourselves, because you are guilty of doing the very same things. 2 We know that God is right to judge everyone who behaves in this way. 3 Do you really think God won't punish you, when you behave exactly like the people you accuse? 4 You surely don't think much of God's wonderful goodness or of his patience and willingness to put up with you. Don't you know that the reason God is good to you is because he wants you to turn to him?

5 But you are stubborn and refuse to turn to God. So you are making things even worse for yourselves on that day when he will show how angry he is and will judge the world with fairness. 6 God will reward each of us for what we have done. 7 He will give eternal life to everyone who has patiently done what is good in the hope of receiving glory, honour, and life that lasts forever. 8 But he will show how angry and furious he can be with every selfish person who rejects the truth and wants to do evil. 9 All who are wicked will be punished with trouble and suffering. It doesn't matter if they are Jews or Gentiles. 10 But all who do right will be rewarded with glory, honour, and peace, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. 11 God doesn't have any favourites!

12 Those people who don't know about God's Law will still be punished for what they do wrong. And the Law will be used to judge everyone who knows what it says. 13 God accepts those who obey his Law, but not those who simply hear it.

Wise man and foolish man!

It would be entirely wrong of me not to tell you that a day is coming when we all will be judged – Jesus talks of it throughout the gospels. The difference for us is that God has taken steps to deal with sin – it is no longer simply about obeying the law. Now salvation comes through faith in Jesus.

John 3:16-18 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Romans 5: 9 But there is more! Now that God has accepted us because Christ sacrificed his life's blood, we will also be kept safe from God's anger. 10 Even when

we were God's enemies, he made peace with us, because his Son died for us. Yet something even greater than friendship is ours. Now that we are at peace with God, we will be saved by his Son's life.

2 things – through believing that Jesus is God's son, that he's worth following, that he will forgive our sin we can have new life with God – we will be saved.

We can have friendship with God – something even greater than friendship is ours.

Don't have time to cover these but have a think about it later

1. Prayer works: When Amos sees the first two visions he calls out to God and God relents. Amos didn't pray the third time because he knew that God was within his rights to see if the people were being obedient. We know that prayer works – we just don't do it enough and we need to.
2. Sometimes they shoot the messenger! (10-17) Amos was accused of prophesying for money; his message was twisted and not properly relayed to the King; he was abused because of his background. That might happen to us if we bring God's message to people – Amos simply replied that he was being obedient to God's call on his life. Sometimes that's all we have to fall back on.

IF you are here today and you don't yet know Jesus for yourself I feel that I must say that the consequences for you are dire. You might be a generous, compassionate, 'good' person – you might have come to church for years or this might be the first time but if you have not asked God to forgive you and decided to put him first in your life then God says you are lost. Why should you follow Jesus?

Acts 4:12 *Only Jesus has the power to save! His name is the only one in all the world that can save anyone.*