

The Rich and the Poor

by Julie Snyder

FAITH STORY:

Amos 5

FAITH FOCUS:

The people of Israel (the Northern Kingdom after the United Monarchy split) were living in unfaithfulness to God. They were worshipping idols in places that used to be dedicated to worshipping God. The Israelites were perverting justice and taking bribes. The poor were being exploited; the rich were keeping justice from being done and taking food from the poor population. The rich built large houses and planted vineyards. God was not happy with this behavior, and promised to judge Israel for its sins. The Israelites were looking forward to the “Day of the Lord”— the day that God would prevail over the godless nations around Israel. But God told the Israelites that the Day of the Lord would not be a happy celebration because they had become one of the nations who blasphemed God. Amos shouted out to the nation of Israel, calling them to repent in the hopes of softening the blow of the judgment that was coming.

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Study the passage and materials ahead of time
- Bibles for everyone
- A whiteboard or easel and markers (something big to write on)
- Index cards (one per student) with *rich* written on half of the cards and *poor* written on the other half.
- Napkins, hand wipes and cups
- Food—doughnuts, juice, milk, bread, butter and water.
- Knife to cut bread
- Find out what your youth could do to minister to persons who are poor and/or hungry. Contact MCC about putting together health or school kits, your local food pantry, etc. Bring a list of suggestions that the youth can choose from for a service activity

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS:

Greet each student as they come in and spend a few minutes de-briefing about their week. Then hand out the index cards. Ask the *rich group* to sit at a table and have the *poor group* sit in a circle on the floor. Give the doughnuts, juice and milk to the *rich group*. Give the *poor group* the loaf of bread, butter and water. Tell everyone they can start eating. As soon as the *poor group* gets their bread buttered, tell them they have to cut their piece in half and take it to one of the *rich group*. If someone protests, tell them that it's the job of the poor to support the rich, that's just the way it is. After the *rich group* has finished their doughnuts, bring everyone together.

CONNECT:

Discuss:

- How did the *poor group* feel?
- Did those feelings intensify or change when you asked them to give up half of their bread, too?
- How did the *rich group* feel? Did they want to share?
- Are places that this happens in real life today? Where?
- How do you think God feels about that?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Ask students to open their Bibles to Amos 5. Have each student read 1-2 verses (there are 26 verses). Make a chart on the whiteboard with two columns labeled "Do" and "Don't". Ask students to skim back through the chapter to find things that God said to do and not to do. Include the result of each action.

For example: verse 4- **do**: "seek Me" **result**: "live".. Verse 5- **don't**: "seek Bethel" **result**: "Bethel will come to nothing".

When you finish the list, put a star by each item that has to do with social justice. Put a dot by everything having to do with idolatry. Discuss the correlation.

- Does following God have social implications?
- If we let something take a higher place in our lives than God, will the way we live our lives suffer?

- What does God think about idolatry and injustice?

Turn to Luke 4:14-21 and read the passage.

Discuss:

- Does Jesus' ministry sound like one that is involved with tangible witness to the community?
- Do you think that someone who is poor is more likely to believe that God is gracious and faithful if their kids are full or hungry?
- What role does reaching people's physical needs play in evangelism?
- What does your church do to demonstrate God's love in tangible ways in the community?
- Can you think of any possible judgments for not tending to the poor and hungry in the community around you? What about blessings?

APPLY AND RESPOND:

Discuss specific ways that youth can tend to the physical needs of those around them and around the world. What can they do personally? What can the church do? What about church agencies? How can they be a part of the work of church agencies like MCC? Share the list you brought and plan to do some specific activities as a youth group.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

Amos was a shepherd and caretaker of sycamore trees. He prophesied c. 750 BC in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) even though he was from the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Commentators think that this could be the only time someone from Judah prophesied only in Israel and vice versa. Amos' prophecies are of judgment in Israel by the means of military defeat. The nation of Israel had turned to idolatry and forsaken the Shalom community that God had outlined in the Law.

The places mentioned in verse 5 have special significance. They all used to be places set aside for God. Bethel is particularly of note. It had been a place of worship since Jacob's time and had become a chief sanctuary for Israel. Jereboam, a wicked king of Israel, set a golden calf in the sanctuary at Bethel and the people worshipped it. (1 Kings 12:25-33).

V. 1-3 are really versed like a funeral dirge. God is grieving the loss of Israel's faithfulness deeply.

V. 4-5 are very significant theologically. When the Lord tells the Israelites to seek Him but not to go to what had been places of worship, the implication is that you can seek God without the rituals. Essentially, God is saying "You don't need an altar to worship Me."

V. 8-9 reminds the Israelites of who it is that they are rejecting. The “deep darkness” mentioned here is not talking about death but rather the same idea as the “valley of the shadow of death” in Psalm 23. The God who can turn that dark night of the soul into morning, the God who controls the most fierce elements of nature – this is the God who the people have turned their backs on.

V. 10-13 speaks of the injustice done at the city gates. All matter of business and personal disputes took place at the city gate. It was the courthouse of the day.

V. 18-20 talks about the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord was eagerly looked forward to by devout Jews and was seen as the time when God would come and strike down their enemies. The Lord would finally purge Israel of their enemies, those who blaspheme and reject God. What this passage reveals is that Israel has, in fact, become an enemy of God. The Day of the Lord would be a day of judgment on Israel, not their enemies.

V. 21-15 Worship without obedience isn't acceptable. As collaborated by Micah 6:6-8 and Psalm 51:17, obedience is a prerequisite for acceptable worship.