

Bible Challenge September 25 – October 1, 2016

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions of different ways to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

INTRODUCTION

Consideration of and care for those in need (especially those "at our gate," visible to us, of whom we are aware) is an essential component of good stewardship. It is in the sharing of wealth that we avoid the snare of wealth. It is the one whom death could not hold—who comes to us risen from the dead—who can free us from the death grip of greed.

DAY ONE: Amos 6:1a, 4-7

The prophet Amos announces that Israel's great wealth is a cause not for rejoicing but rather sorrow, because God's people have forgotten how to share their wealth with the poor. The wealthy will be the first to go into exile when judgment comes.

- ^{1a}Alas for those who are at ease in Zion,
and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria,
⁴Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;
⁵who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,
and like David improvise on instruments of music;
⁶who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
⁷Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

Adventure Challenge: Amos 6.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Research the unfamiliar place names in Amos 6 and their likely importance for this prophecy about the wealthy of Israel.

Option B: Read an introduction to Amos to learn the context of this challenging prophecy.

Option C: How does this vision of God from Amos compare with your own vision of God?

DAY TWO: Psalm 146

Give praise to the LORD who reigns forever and gives justice to those who are oppressed.

- ¹Hallelujah!
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
²I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.
³Put not your trust in rulers,
in mortals in whom there is no help.
⁴When they breathe their last, they return to earth,
and in that day their thoughts perish.
⁵Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help,
whose hope is in the LORD their God;
⁶who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them;
who keeps promises forever;
⁷who gives justice to those who are oppressed,

and food to those who hunger.

The LORD sets the captive free.

⁸The LORD opens the eyes of the blind;
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹The LORD cares for the stranger;
the LORD sustains the orphan and widow,
but frustrates the way of the wicked.

¹⁰The LORD shall reign forever,
your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Hallelujah!

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 146

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Read alternative translations of this psalm.

Option B: Compare Psalm 146 with Psalm 148. Both “praise the Lord,” but for different reasons.

DAY THREE: 1 Timothy 6:6-19

Timothy is reminded of the confession he made at his baptism and of its implications for daily life. His priorities will be different from those of people who merely want to be rich.

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

¹¹But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

¹⁷As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Timothy 6 (If you have read the Adventure Challenge for the two previous weeks, read 1 Timothy 4-6 to finish reading all of 1 Timothy).

Explorer Challenge: Compare 1 Timothy 6:17 – 19 (and 1 Timothy 6:1-2) with the reading from Amos for Day One.

DAY FOUR: Luke 16:19-31

Jesus tells a parable in which the poor one is "lifted up" and the rich one is "sent away empty." Jesus makes it clear that this ethic of merciful reversal is not new but is as old as Moses and the prophets.

[Jesus said:] ¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool

my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' ²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' ²⁷He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' ³⁰He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Adventure Challenge: Luke 16 (or Luke 15 and 16 to read together this group of parables about wealth and relative value).

Explorer Challenge: Read the Wikipedia article on “The Rich Man and Lazarus.”

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY: O God, rich in mercy, you look with compassion on this troubled world. Feed us with your grace, and grant us the treasure that comes only from you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION: You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9)

Explorer Challenge: Meditate on the meaning(s) for the word *rich* as it is used in phrases like “a rich man ... who feasted sumptuously,” “God, rich in mercy,” “Jesus though rich, yet became poor so that you might become rich.”