



SUNDAY SCHOOL SEPTEMBER 28, 2025

Prayer:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Old Testament2

Amos 6:1a, 4-7 2

 Complacent Self-Indulgence Will Be Punished 2

 Overview 2

 Biblical Context..... 2

 Historical / Non-Biblical / Political Context 3

 Historical Timeline / Biblical Timeframe..... 3

 Scholarly Metaphorical Interpretation With Modern-Day & Grant County Context 3

 Summary 4

Luke 16:19-31.....5

 The Rich Man and Lazarus 5

 Overview 5

 Biblical Context..... 5

 Historical / Non-Biblical / Political Context 6

 Historical Timeline / Biblical Timeframe..... 6

 Scholarly Metaphorical Interpretation With Modern-Day & Grant County Context 6

 Summary 6

Addendums.....7

Prayer 7

 Dissecting the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4)..... 7

 Does God Come to Us, or Do We Go to God in Prayer? 8

 Is Prayer About “Getting to Heaven”? 8

The Book of Amos 9

 Biblical Context..... 9

 Historical/Non-Biblical Context 9

 Historical Timeline/Timeframe..... 9

 Scholarly Metaphorical Interpretation with Modern-Day Context 9

 Summary of the Book of Amos..... 10

 Conclusion 10

Note: Today’s reading scripture is not the same as the researched scripture for Sunday School. Our Sunday School scripture is based on the Lectionary, and Bob will be preaching on something coming from his heart. The reason we stayed with the Lectionary is that our Research is now being used at First UMC’s Sunday School as they go through a course called “The Year of the Bible”, which follows the Lectionary scripture.



Old Testament

Amos 6:1a, 4-7

COMPLACENT SELF-INDULGENCE WILL BE PUNISHED

A Message of Justice to Leaders

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion
and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria,
the notables of the first of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel resorts!

Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory
and lounge on their couches
and eat lambs from the flock
and calves from the stall,
who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp
and like David improvise on instruments of music,
who drink wine from bowls
and anoint themselves with the finest oils
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!

Therefore, they shall now be the first to go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

OVERVIEW

Amos 6:1a, 4-7 delivers a sharp critique against the complacent and indulgent leaders of Israel and Judah. The prophet condemns those who live in luxury while ignoring justice, warning that their comforts will not save them from impending judgment. The verses focus on those “at ease in Zion” and “secure on Mount Samaria,” who recline on ivory couches, feast on lambs and calves, and drink wine from bowls ... all while being oblivious to the ruin of their nation. The consequence: they will be the first to go into exile.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Amos was a shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees from Tekoa, called by God to prophesy primarily against the northern kingdom of Israel (8th century BCE). His ministry occurs during a time of prosperity under Jeroboam II, but also a time of rampant injustice, idolatry, and inequality.

- **Amos 6:1a** points to both Judah (“Zion”) and Israel (“Samaria”), signaling that complacency crosses boundaries.
- **Verses 4-6** describe indulgence: luxurious furniture, extravagant meals, anointing with oils, and excess in drinking.
- **Verse 7** brings the prophetic reversal: those enjoying privilege will be the first into exile, stripped of their comforts.

The message echoes throughout Amos: God desires justice, not ritualistic worship or empty displays of religiosity.



HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

During the reigns of Jeroboam II in Israel (786–746 BCE) and Uzziah in Judah (783–742 BCE), the region enjoyed relative peace and prosperity. Israel expanded its borders and increased wealth through trade. However:

- **Economic disparity** widened: elites lived in luxury while the poor suffered.
- **Political arrogance** grew: leaders felt secure due to military strength and alliances.
- **Religious complacency** was rampant: people assumed their prosperity was proof of God's favor, even while neglecting covenantal justice.

Non-biblical historical parallels include the Assyrian empire's rise during this same era. Within a generation, Assyria's strength would crush Israel (fall of Samaria in 722 BCE). Amos's warning of exile was fulfilled historically in this geopolitical context.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **~760 BCE**: Amos begins prophesying.
- **753 BCE**: Jeroboam II dies; instability grows.
- **745 BCE onward**: Assyria re-emerges as a dominant power.
- **722 BCE**: Israel falls to Assyria, fulfilling Amos's warnings of exile.

Amos 6 directly addresses the false sense of security in the years just before this collapse.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Scholars view this passage as a critique of **false security, complacency, and indulgence amid social injustice**. The imagery of couches, feasts, and bowls of wine highlights not just wealth but detachment from the suffering of others.

- **Metaphorical Lens Today:**
 - Amos warns against a "bubble of comfort" where people believe prosperity or security insulates them from accountability.
 - Leaders and communities focused on their own luxury often ignore systemic problems until it's too late.
- **Modern U.S. Application:**
 - The text critiques gated wealth, consumer culture, and the widening gap between rich and poor.
 - It challenges both political and religious institutions that celebrate stability while ignoring injustice.
- **Grant County, Indiana Context:**
 - On a local level, parallels might be drawn between Amos's ivory couches and today's "comfort zones" in small-town life.
 - It is tempting to be "at ease" in familiar traditions, comfortable routines, or even nostalgic pride, while larger issues—economic decline, addiction crises, housing shortages, or lack of opportunities—go unaddressed.
 - Amos's words could be heard as: don't mistake local stability or church fellowship meals as signs that all is well if justice and compassion are neglected in the community.

The metaphorical warning: a society that prioritizes self-comfort over justice risks collapse from forces outside its control (for Israel, Assyria; for modern communities, perhaps economic pressures, cultural shifts, or neglect of the vulnerable).



SUMMARY

Amos 6:1a, 4-7 confronts the wealthy and complacent in both Israel and Judah. The prophet condemns their indulgent lifestyles and false sense of security while ignoring societal injustice and impending danger. Historically, this warning materialized in the Assyrian conquest and exile. Metaphorically, the text challenges modern readers to consider how comfort, wealth, and routine can blind communities—including those in places like Grant County, Indiana—to underlying problems. The passage urges vigilance, humility, and justice as the true marks of security with God.

See Addendum on Book of Amos



Luke 16:19-31

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Jesus addressing wealth, stewardship & responsibility

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.

“The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

“In Hades, where he was being tormented, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He 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.’

“But 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. Besides 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.’

“He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house — for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’

“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’

“He said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

“He 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.’”

OVERVIEW

This passage is a parable Jesus tells about a rich man, who lives in luxury, and a poor beggar named Lazarus, who suffers at his gate. When both die, Lazarus is carried to “Abraham’s bosom” (a Jewish metaphor for comfort in the afterlife), while the rich man is tormented in Hades. A chasm separates them, and the rich man’s pleas for relief and warnings to his brothers are denied. The story emphasizes reversal of fortunes, the permanence of divine justice, and the sufficiency of Scripture for guidance.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- This parable comes in a section of Luke where Jesus is addressing wealth, stewardship, and responsibility (Luke 15–16).
- Preceding it is the parable of the dishonest manager (16:1–13) and teaching about serving God vs. money (16:13).
- Pharisees, “lovers of money” (16:14), scoffed at Jesus, which frames this parable as both warning and critique.
- Lazarus is the only named character in any parable, possibly signaling God’s particular care for the poor and oppressed.



HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Wealth and Poverty in 1st-century Judea:** Wealth disparity was stark. Rich elites (landowners, temple aristocracy, Roman collaborators) lived with extravagance, while many peasants struggled for daily survival.
- **Religious worldview:** Jewish thought contained ideas of Sheol (the realm of the dead), Gehenna (a place of judgment), and Abraham's bosom (a symbol of covenantal belonging ... a sense of safety, identity, and inheritance that comes from being part of God's family). This parable taps into those cultural references.
- **Roman occupation:** Heavy taxation and land seizures widened inequality, leaving beggars like Lazarus common sights at wealthy gates.
- **Political edge:** Jesus' story critiques not just individuals but also the systemic neglect of the poor, cutting against both Roman and Jewish elite structures.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Setting of the story:** Mid-1st century CE, during Jesus' ministry, around 30 CE.
- **Authorship of Luke:** Likely between 70–90 CE, when Christian communities were wrestling with issues of wealth, inclusion of Gentiles, and justice.
- **Audience:** Luke writes to a broader Greco-Roman audience, emphasizing reversals—those marginalized in life may be honored in God's kingdom.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

- **Metaphor of the chasm:** Represents the hardening of human hearts and the social divide between wealthy and poor. In today's context, this might be the widening economic and cultural gaps we see between those who "have" and those who "have not."
- **Lazarus at the gate:** A reminder that suffering people are not far away—they're often right at our doorstep. In Grant County, this could point to food insecurity, addiction struggles, or the hidden homeless population.
- **The rich man's blindness:** His sin wasn't wealth itself but ignoring Lazarus. Similarly, churches and communities risk moral blindness when they become absorbed in self-preservation rather than service.
- **Scripture as sufficient:** Abraham's words, "They have Moses and the Prophets", suggest that the resources for compassion and justice are already in hand. Today, the Bible, along with community wisdom, already calls us to act; we can't wait for miraculous signs to stir us.
- **Modern reversal:** Just as Lazarus was elevated, those overlooked in Grant County (single mothers, factory workers displaced by automation, struggling farmers) may be honored in God's economy.

SUMMARY

Luke 16:19-31 is a parable warning about wealth, compassion, and eternal accountability. It contrasts the comfort of the rich man with the suffering of Lazarus, then reverses their fates in the afterlife. The story critiques indifference to the needy and stresses that God's justice is not only inevitable but permanent. For today, the parable challenges us to see those "at our gates" in Grant County and beyond—not as nuisances, but as bearers of dignity whom God elevates. The call is to respond now, with the resources we already have, rather than waiting for signs or excuses.



Addendums

Prayer

Last week, we talked about prayer a lot and that led to some interesting feedback and questions. As promised, I've done a dissection of the Lord's Prayer. Additionally, there were a couple of other "prayer takeaways" addressed below.

DISSECTING THE LORD'S PRAYER (MATTHEW 6:9–13; LUKE 11:2–4)

"Our Father, who art in heaven"

Not just formality—this is about relationship. We begin not with ourselves but with belonging. In today's words: *You are not alone. You are loved by a God who is both transcendent and close, like a parent who listens.*

"Hallowed be thy name"

We honor God's character. This isn't flattery—it's orientation. *Let me live in a way that reflects Your goodness, holiness, and justice.* Think less about saying the right words and more about letting God's holiness set the tone for your own life.

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"

This is active, not passive. We're asking God to reshape our world—and ourselves—to look more like heaven. In today's words: *Help me live so that my choices make earth a little more like heaven—fairer, kinder, more whole.*

"Give us this day our daily bread"

It's about dependence and sufficiency. Not abundance, not tomorrow's storehouse, but today's need. *Teach me to be content with enough, and to notice those who still hunger—physically and spiritually.*

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us"

Forgiveness is reciprocal. We can't cling to bitterness while asking God to release us. *Free me from my guilt, and free me from the chains of resentment toward others.*

"Lead us not into temptation"

It's not that God *causes* temptation, but that we ask for guidance when we're weak. *Help me recognize my blind spots and keep me from paths that pull me away from You.*

"But deliver us from evil"

We're not strong enough on our own. Evil is real—within us, around us, and in systems larger than us. *Be my rescuer when darkness presses in.*

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen."

A later liturgical addition, but meaningful. It reminds us to end in praise. *This is bigger than me. God's story is the beginning and the end.*

Thoughts on How to Pray this Prayer:

- **Shift from recitation to reflection.** Encourage them to slow down, maybe even take one line at a time in silence.



- **Translate into today's energy.** Ask: *What does this mean in my life right now?*
- **Make it practical.** For example, “daily bread” could spark discussion on food insecurity, gratitude, or resisting consumerism.
- **Highlight movement.** The prayer moves from heaven’s perspective (“Our Father...”) to daily life (“daily bread”), to relationships (forgiveness), to personal struggle (temptation), and finally back to God’s glory. It’s a spiritual journey in miniature.

DOES GOD COME TO US, OR DO WE GO TO GOD IN PRAYER?

1. God Comes to Us

- **Biblical grounding:** Throughout scripture, God is the initiator. In Eden, God “walked in the garden” (Genesis 3). In Christ, God *came down* to dwell among us (John 1:14). The Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26).
- **Implication:** Prayer isn’t about “finding the right ladder” to climb up—it’s more like opening the door to One who is already knocking (Revelation 3:20).
- **Today’s language:** *God is already near. Prayer tunes our hearts to notice the Presence that’s there.*

2. We Go to God

- **Biblical grounding:** Jesus often withdrew to pray (Mark 1:35). The psalms are filled with “lifting up my eyes” and “crying out.” There’s movement, effort, desire.
- **Implication:** Prayer involves intention. We make space, reorient, and actively seek God’s face.
- **Today’s language:** *Prayer is us leaning in, showing up, and opening ourselves to relationship.*

3. Both-And, Not Either-Or

- **Theological tension:** This isn’t an either/or. God moves toward us; we respond. Think of it as *mutual approach*: God’s grace initiates, our response deepens.
- **Analogy:** Like a parent and child—sometimes the parent stoops down, sometimes the child runs to the parent, but the relationship is alive in both movements.

IS PRAYER ABOUT “GETTING TO HEAVEN”?

- **Transactional view:** If prayer (or faith) is framed as “I do X, God gives me Y (heaven),” it becomes a contract rather than a relationship. That diminishes grace and can lead to anxiety: *Have I done enough?*
- **Relational view:** Jesus framed eternal life not just as a future destination, but as *knowing God now* (John 17:3). Heaven is not the reward for loving God—it is the fulfillment of loving God.
- **Practical takeaway:**
 - *If we love God only to get heaven, we miss the point.*
 - *If we love God for who God is, then heaven is simply the natural continuation of that love.*

Discuss:

- When you pray, do you feel more like God is coming to you, or you are going to God?
- How does it change our faith if we see prayer as a relationship instead of a transaction?
- What does “eternal life” mean to you—something future, or something you can taste now? This is a very existential thought.



The Book of Amos

The Book of Amos is one of the twelve minor prophets in the Old Testament. Amos, a shepherd from the southern kingdom of Judah, was called by God to prophesy primarily against the northern kingdom of Israel. His message focused on social justice, condemning the wealthy elite for exploiting the poor and ignoring God's laws. Amos is notable for emphasizing that true worship of God is inseparable from justice and righteousness.

Amos is one of my favorites, if not the favorite books of the Bible. It fits keenly with the United Methodist Social Justice structure.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Amos' ministry took place during the reign of Jeroboam II (786–746 BCE), a time of great prosperity for Israel. However, this wealth led to significant social inequality, corruption, and religious complacency. Amos warned that Israel's moral decay would lead to divine judgment. He delivered oracles against Israel and surrounding nations for their injustices, while advocating for repentance and justice. Amos is unique among the prophets for being an outsider from Judah, sent to criticize Israel.

HISTORICAL/NON-BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Amos prophesied during a period when Israel was expanding territorially and economically. The rich were getting richer, while the poor were being oppressed through corrupt business practices, unjust courts, and unfaithfulness to the covenant. Though the nation enjoyed external peace and prosperity, Amos warned that internal corruption would lead to its destruction.

Outside of Israel, the ancient Near East was experiencing its own upheavals. Assyria, a growing power to the northeast, would soon become a threat to Israel and Judah. Amos' prophecies foreshadow the Assyrian invasion that would eventually lead to the fall of Israel in 722 BCE.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE/TIMEFRAME

- **Date:** Approximately 760–755 BCE.
- **Reign of Jeroboam II:** A prosperous but morally decadent time for Israel.
- **Fall of Israel:** Amos' prophecies anticipated the fall of Israel, which occurred in 722 BCE when the Assyrians invaded.

Amos fits chronologically between the earlier prophets like Elijah and Elisha and later prophets such as Isaiah and Hosea.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY CONTEXT

Scholars interpret Amos as a prophetic critique of religious hypocrisy and social injustice. One of Amos' key messages is that religious rituals and festivals mean nothing if the people neglect justice, mercy, and righteousness. The famous verse, **"Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"** (Amos 5:24), highlights this theme.

In a modern-day context, Amos can be seen as a call for social responsibility. Many interpret Amos as speaking out against systemic injustice, inequality, and the exploitation of the vulnerable. His words challenge religious communities today to focus not only on piety and worship but also on societal reform and caring for the oppressed. His warnings against complacency and moral decay resonate with contemporary issues like poverty, corporate greed, and racial injustice.



SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

The Book of Amos contains nine chapters and can be divided as follows:

- **Judgment on the Nations (Chapters 1–2):** Amos begins by announcing judgment not just on Israel, but on surrounding nations (Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, etc.) for their transgressions. This sets the stage for his central message to Israel.
- **Judgment on Israel (Chapters 3–6):** Amos shifts his focus to Israel, condemning them for exploiting the poor, neglecting justice, and indulging in empty religious rituals. He calls them to repent but warns that God's judgment is imminent.
- **Visions of Judgment (Chapters 7–9):** Amos recounts several visions of Israel's destruction, including locusts, fire, and a plumb line measuring the nation's righteousness. He concludes with a message of hope, foretelling a future restoration for Israel after its punishment.

Amos' message of repentance is ignored by the elites of Israel, and his prophecies of destruction come to pass when Israel falls to the Assyrians.

CONCLUSION

The Book of Amos serves as a powerful reminder that true faithfulness to God requires justice, fairness, and righteousness. Amos' critique of social injustice and hypocrisy remains relevant in modern discussions of religion and ethics. His words urge believers to ensure that their worship aligns with their treatment of others, particularly the poor and marginalized.

