



Christians must be taught that giving to the poor or lending to the needy is a better work than buying indulgences.

– Martin Luther –

Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Amos 8:4-7

The prophet Amos proclaimed God's wrath over his people's treatment of the poor among them. This mistreatment of the poor even infiltrated the religious life of the people. They could hardly wait for the required religious observances to be over so they could get back to taking advantage of those among them who had no recourse.

The merchants tilted the scales in their own favor, sold goods on credit only to charge exorbitant interest, they sold worthless goods like the sweepings of the wheat. Their methods for bilking the poor out of their last dime were limitless. Amos' warning to the people was that God would never forget this behavior. God is not impressed by grudging observance of ritual law while ignoring those portions of the law that demand care for the poor.

- Do you see any parallels to Amos' charges in our current economic practices? In what ways do we take advantage of the least among us?
- Is there any difference between what Amos was objected to (via the Lord's call to repentance) and businesses in our neighborhoods that charge those on the fringes exorbitant interest? (For example Title Loan Companies and Cash Advance Companies that charge upwards of 200% interest.) If so, what's the difference? Does it make it ok for them since they are businesses? Why or why not?
- What are some ways that we put more emphasis on the rituals of our faith rather than on the call to love one another?

Psalms 113

In stark contrast to Amos' description of Israel's treatment of the poor, we find the Psalmist proclaiming what God does for those in need. Rather than trampling over them, the Lord raises the poor from the dust. Rather than taking advantage of them, he gives them places of honor. In further contrast to Israel's habits, the Psalmist described the rightful way to praise God. Rather than asking, "When will this be over?" the faithful praise the name of the Lord from the rising of the sun to its setting.

- In what ways do you see God raising the poor from the dust? Is this psalm describing what we can expect in this life?
- What would it look like to praise the name of the Lord from sunrise to sunset? What does it mean to live our lives in a manner that reflects who our God is?
- In verse 7, the psalmist refers to raising the poor from the dust. How are the wealthy AND the poor raised from dust? (Gen. 2:7)?

1 Timothy 2:1-15

Paul urged Christians to pray for all people asserting that God desires all people to be saved and come to know the saving power of Christ Jesus. Of particular interest is for believers to pray for those in power so that all might live quiet and peaceful lives.

- What is it like to pray for someone with whom you have profound disagreement? If you don't like a certain ruler, is it difficult to pray for them? How does that make it ever more important to offer prayers for their sake?

The epistle moves on to the matter of appropriate behaviors of the members of the church. Of particular concern seems to be the behavior and demeanor of the women of the church in Ephesus. This passage has provided a rationale for limitations on the role of women in the church and submission of women in the home. Whether the epistle intends this to be a normative view throughout the church or is addressing a specific issue in Ephesus has been hotly debated. Either way, what is clear is that serving in the office of ministry is not an inalienable right.

- How does this lesson challenge or affirm your view of a woman's role in the church? In the home?

Luke 16:1-15

The parable of the dishonest manager is a continuation of Jesus' response to the Pharisees' complaints about his dinner companions. The manager in the parable has been accused of "squandering" the rich man's property. The Pharisees, meanwhile, consider themselves careful guardians of what has been entrusted to them, and believe Jesus is squandering God's mercy on undeserving sinners.

The manager in the parable makes friends for himself by reducing the debts various people owe his master. All those who spend their energy tweaking the law do likewise. They spend their efforts making the law slightly less costly. But in the end, a debt is still owed. The Pharisees had gained great popularity for themselves through their treatment of the law, but they finally put themselves in opposition to God in the flesh.

- What are some ways we try to get the law under control and make it more manageable?

Jesus warned about the dangers of trying to serve two masters.

- Why is it impossible to serve both God and wealth?