

LEAD SHEET

Spiritual Opposites - WK. 3

GRACE & JUSTICE

MARCH 20, 2016

THIS MONTH'S FAITH SKILL:

DIALOGUE WITH GOD

If you want to know God better, talk to Him!

GETTING STARTED

(The crimes reviewed earlier are no laughing matter, but the idea is to get students thinking about what is deserved/what is not deserved)

Now that we've made judgments about these criminals, let's try to make some judgments about things that you and I have done. I want you to think about a time in your life when you either

- 1.) did something and were punished, or
- 2.) didn't do something wrong and got in trouble anyway.

Maybe the punishment was too severe. Maybe you did something and got off with a little punishment. Let's share some stories and make the same judgments we just made —did we deserve it or not?

DIGGING IN

We will be digging into the Book of Amos. Since Amos is one of the lesser-studied books of the Old Testament, let's start with some background information:

- The nation of Israel at this time was thriving. They enjoyed peace, prosperity, and power in the region

- The nation of Israel spiritually, however, was deteriorating. They had fallen into idolatry. Their devotion to the one true God was at an all-time low.

- At the time the book of Amos was written, God spoke through prophets. Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, are among the prophets whose ministries are recorded in the Old Testament. They prophesied in the mid 700s BC
- Amos is a shepherd boy, from a small village in Judah. He would've been looked at as an inferior person socially. He was a redneck of sorts, someone who did not have a high status among city folks.
- Amos, despite his social status, is called by God. He shows up in Israel and starts reciting poetry about the destruction of their nation.

Read Amos 5:1-17

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you define justice?
2. What are some of the phrases and words in this passage that make it sound like justice is going to be served? *(Below is a list of examples. If students can't come up with any, go through the list.)*

--fallen and never to rise, deserted with no one to help lift her (verse 2)

--90% casualties (1000 – 100, 100 – 10) (verse 3)

--God as unquenchable fire (verse 6)

--wailing in the streets, cries of anguish (verse 16)

--God will pass through their midst (verse 17)

Sounds rough, doesn't it? Sometimes it's hard to think of God as one who serves up justice, especially in some of those terms. We want to think about forgiveness, kindness, and grace. But what did the Israelites deserve? Try this definition of justice:

JUSTICE: The administration of deserved punishment or reward

God is a God of justice. He's the Lord God Almighty (used 7 times in Amos—more than any other book— despite the book being very short.) Don't forget who's talking ("Lord" in some form is used 8 times in these 17 verses). God is in charge, and He punishes sin.

But God is also a God of grace.

Discussion Questions (continued):

3. How would you define grace?

4. Can you find any verses in this passage that discusses grace? (*Have students look over the passage for examples.*)

Let's operate with this definition of grace:

GRACE: The unmerited favor of God

When we talk about grace, we usually mean forgiveness. But that is cheapening the word in some ways. Grace is not just something God gives to us, it's something He is. The favor of God is part of His personality.

We also usually think of grace as something that is readily available. There are plenty of verses that make us think this way, and rightly so. But if we re-examined those verses, we'd see that God's grace comes to us after we turn to Him.

(Have students look over the passage again for the phrase "and live.")

Discussion Questions (Continued):

5. With the prediction of judgment, God says that His people can live. But what must they do to live, according to the passage? (*They must seek Him.*)

Read Amos 5:14-15

Discussion Questions:

1. What surprises you about this verse? What do you think of the word, “perhaps”?
2. Does God have to forgive you?
Some of you live for cheap grace, like it’s automatic, as if God does what we say.
3. If the people of Israel were required to seek God to live, what do you think we must do? (*The same thing!* If we want to receive God’s grace, we must seek Him out.)

MAKING IT REAL

This is a hard teaching for most of us to hear, especially if we haven’t thought about it much before. The balance between grace and justice in the Scriptures is a difficult one. But let’s test our theory by looking at many of the Scriptures we often point to when we want to be reminded of God’s grace and forgiveness.

Read the following Scriptures:

1 John 1:9

James 4:6-8

Romans 6:1-7

Acts 2:38

Discussion Questions:

1. In any of those verses, does forgiveness come automatically, or is something asked of the person being forgiven? (*In each, something is asked. 1 John says “if” we confess our sins, James says “draw near to God,” Romans says we must die to ourselves, and Acts says we must have a Spirit of repentance.*)
2. Does this change the way you think about grace and forgiveness?
3. Why do you think God makes His grace conditional?

This is, again, a hard teaching, but it's very Biblical. God's covenant with us is the same as it was with the Israelites in Amos. We can be forgiven, but we must honor our end of the covenant, seeking good, living humbly, submitting ourselves to God.

The difference in our covenant with the people of Israel is that we have the very real expression of grace and justice to look back upon—Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the ultimate example of both justice and grace. Justice came upon Him on our behalf so that grace is available. He personified the grace of God in His teaching, actions, and presence. He also personified the justice of God when He was flogged, crucified, and died. So for us, what we receive either "grace" or "justice" depends upon what we do with Jesus Christ.

- If you've never given yourself to Him, accept Him now or receive the justice of God
- If you have, stop taking Him for granted and allow His grace to change your life.

Let's pray that we can respond to Jesus in fresh ways today.

CLOSING PRAYER

#CRAZYFORCHRIST