

Reflection

Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances."

Amos 8:4,5

Corruption reigns when honest systems are overridden by weak hearts and greedy hands. Injustice and poverty are allowed to breed when governments, institutions and individuals lack integrity and allow themselves to be powered by selfish ambition.

When God speaks to the Israelites through the prophet Amos, he condemns the way in which they are motivated by financial gain and unfair trading; they are marginalizing the poor and ignoring the law. God's anger is fuelled by the way in which their actions split apart the community and corrupt his life-giving creation.

Just as God speaks to Israel about corruption in their midst, so he speaks to us about the integrity of our hearts. The book of Proverbs in the Bible constantly alludes to God's desire that our hearts should be pure and our lives marked by openness and honesty. However, we are easily tainted by the decay and destruction that comes about because of greed and selfishness. Jesus challenges his followers to be like salt and light - flavouring the world with truth, and allowing life to shine out from our words and actions. When Zacchaeus the tax collector meets Jesus, his life is turned around. He stops his corrupt way of life, pays back those he has cheated and starts practising God's values of integrity and honesty.

As we seek accountability and justice in the corrupt places of this world, we must also look at ourselves. We must choose what is right and behave with integrity in our own lives and communities. Corruption fuels poverty and destruction; right values and pure hearts enable life to flourish.