

Poverty

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Date: 26 July 2020

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[0 : 00] It's good to see you. Thanks for being here. Thanks for coming out, realizing that this isn't our normal. It's not really what we're used to, but even if it's less than ideal, having to put on masks, all that, it's so worth it.

I always think of, man, coming together, what we do on Sundays, it is this amazing foretaste of what heaven is going to be like. Sure, we can worship God in our living room. We can praise him at any moment of the day.

We always have access to him, but there's something special, something unique about God's people gathering together in one place and focusing our attention on Jesus and making much of him. It is this beautiful picture of heaven.

You know what I love about Revelation? It talks about the multitudes of the redeemed worshipping Jesus and making much of him. It's missing one huge thing, masks. Thank goodness for that, right? We get to look forward to that.

So this is a temporary thing, and this isn't going to be our normal forever and ever. And so, yeah, realizing that, man, the mask thing, it's a small sacrifice to make, but it is so worth it that more of us get to be together.

[1 : 05] Realize that some of you listening later on during the week, you aren't able to be here for very good reasons. This isn't to, like, try to manipulate you into coming. If it is very dangerous for you to be here, we totally understand that, and we are praying that, man, at some point, yeah, a vaccine comes out or there's medicine.

The medical community figures this thing out, how we can proceed very safely together, gathering in person again. So we are continuing our series in Proverbs.

It's this book of wisdom that guides us through the pitfalls of life. There's so many things. There's so many ways that we can get life wrong, decisions that we could get wrong, and wisdom helps us through those things.

It's a guide. It helps us navigate. Wisdom is important, and it's necessary for us because it's how God made his world. He made it according to his wisdom.

And then, of course, we know that the story begins with that goodness, but it doesn't right away. We mess things up. Human beings, we go against God's wisdom, we sin, and we broke his good creation.

[2 : 10] But God is good. He's full of grace. He's a God of redemption. So instead of just wiping us out and starting all over, he implements this plan of redemption. He saves us. He gives us wisdom for how to navigate through both this broken world and our own sinful nature.

So wisdom is living out God's redemptive plan. It's living in his wisdom. You may be able to walk in wisdom without walking with the Holy Spirit, but you can't follow the Holy Spirit's lead.

You can't be a Spirit-led, Spirit-filled person without walking in wisdom. It's just impossible. And so today we're going to look at what God's wisdom teaches us about the precarious position of poverty.

Proverbs talks a lot about the poor, but particularly the poverty of the poor. And outside of Proverbs, poverty as a word isn't mentioned very much, but in Proverbs, it is used a lot.

And so I'm going to start with this verse in Proverbs 10, 15. It says, A rich man's wealth is his strong city. The poverty of the poor is their ruin.

[3 : 15] And so right away what we get from Proverbs is this idea. Poverty is a state of being vulnerable and powerless. Let's consider that verse. The comparison is very striking, right?

The wealth man, it's like he lives in this strong city. He can insulate himself, fortify himself for whenever difficult times come. But the poverty of the poor means they don't have any such

protection.

There's no savings for them to fall back on. There's no opportunity in front of them. Now, let's consider the first time the word poverty is mentioned in the Bible.

And it's in Genesis 45, verse 11. And it says, There I, it's talking about, this is Joseph speaking. I, Joseph, he's speaking to his brothers, will provide for you.

For there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household and all that you have do not come to poverty. And so Joseph is telling his brothers that he loves, guess what, guys?

[4 : 13] These last two years have been tough. You've already been back to Egypt twice, even though at some point you guys were wealthy. You had a ton of stuff and self-sustaining. Now you don't. And you know, things are getting bad when you got to take long road trips just to buy bread, right?

And that's what Joseph's brothers are having to do for the sake of their family so they could survive. They're like traveling days upon days upon days to get to Egypt to just buy some grain to stay alive. And they've already made that trip twice. So things, he's just warning them, things are going to get bad, not worse. And Egypt is the place that had storehouses of grain. That was their wealth. They had saved up.

They had prepared for this. God gave them an inside scoop of what was going to happen, right?

And so they were able to build this strong, fortified sense of storehouse that they were going to be okay. But everyone else in the world, including Joseph's brothers and his dad, Jacob's family, they had become vulnerable and powerless.

In fact, they were heading towards poverty. And this story is helpful because it's a picture to help us understand what poverty is according to the Bible. Poverty is a reality where you lack the basic needs of life, right?

[5 : 20] Jesus talks about like the basic needs is food and clothing. Paul says the same thing. Man, you know, if we have food and clothing, we can be content with those things. Not only do you lack them, according to the Bible, not only do you lack these basic needs, but you lack the power to get them yourself.

Now, here's the thing, guys. Any of us can find ourselves in this situation. Think about the different ways we could possibly end up in poverty, in ways that we even see throughout the Bible.

And to be honest, we see throughout life when we look around us. One, there's the obvious one, our own sinful choices. We can make bad choices that land us in poverty, right?

Like living for pleasure. Proverbs 21, 17 says, whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man. Think about the prodigal son, right? He took his dad's inheritance. He was wealthy for a while, but he just spent it on pleasure and entertainment and living for himself.

And he landed himself in a pigsty. Absolutely impoverished. Then there's the other sinful choice we can make, which is laziness. Proverbs 10, 4 warns us, a slack hand causes poverty.

[6 : 28] I served in our benevolence ministry for a while at One Harbor. And I remember this couple coming in. They were homeless, and they had this really, this story behind them.

He had lost his job and all that. And I'm listening, and I'm like, hey, man, we'd love to help you out any way possible. We're going to give you a little bit of money for groceries. But you know what? Like, what's keeping you from getting a job?

And he's like, man, I just like, I'm from New Jersey. I can't get a birth certificate. People need a birth certificate for getting a job. And so, man, we lined it up. So we got his birth certificate mailed to us and all that.

And he said, we're going to help you get a job. Never showed up again. Because he wasn't really interested, right, in actually working hard to provide. He just was looking for a handout.

And so there's those things, right? There's laziness that can land us into poverty. The other part of our sinful nature is greed, bad investments, trying to get rich the fast way.

[7 : 23] Remember the 2008 crisis, financial crisis that didn't happen so long ago. The greediness of big corporations landed then in poverty. And fortunately, we had to bail them.

The taxpayers had to bail them out because they couldn't sustain themselves. A lot of companies just went under. But their greed cost a lot of people a lot of money. Man, there was a massive wealth redistribution because of that.

And it hurt a lot of people. Greed, people's choices can hurt us. There's the other part of things that can land us in poverty. We live in a fallen world like we talked about. There's famine, illness,

economic downturns.

We think of the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl that happened in our own country. Man, that made it impossible for a lot of people to live a sustaining life. And then here's one that's going to blow our minds.

Sometimes it's God's purpose for us. He's like, wait, Jesse, that doesn't sound right. Well, think about Job, right? Like God took all his wealth away and he had nothing.

[8 : 21] And he's at a point where he says, you know what? From dust I came to dust I shall return. But you know what? Job's particular thing, that was a season of testing, right? God had a greater purpose for what he was doing in Job's life.

And then finally, sometimes poverty comes upon us because of oppression and injustice, right? The powerful are oppressing the poor. We look at the Israelites in Egypt.

They were enslaved. They were in poverty. They couldn't make do for themselves. They needed to be supported by Egypt. You could see that when they were in the wilderness wandering around and they were kind of hungry for food.

And they're just like, oh, why did we ever leave Egypt? At least they gave us food to eat. We had pots of meat and all this amazing stuff supplied by the Egyptians, the very slave masters. And so they were totally dependent on these things.

And that happens even today. The not-so-recent past, my grandpa Kinser, he grew up in Blue Ridge Mountains of Kentucky. He was a coal miner from the age of 12 because he was an orphan.

[9 : 23] That's the only way he can make money. And the thing about coal mining, the company owned you. So you didn't work for them to get a paycheck. You worked for them to get company credits.

You lived in company housing. You didn't own your own home. You had to shop at the company store, right? You ever, any of you guys know that song, you load 16 tons? What do you get?

Another day older and you're deeper in debt.

That was a song about coal miners in those days. And they were impoverished. They didn't have much. And there was no way for them to get ahead.

The more they worked, the more they were in debt to the company. And the company owned them. So I'm pointing all this out. So why is it important to understand the various ways that we can end up in poverty?

It's so that we can become less judgmental toward the poor and actually grow in compassion. See, the poor need our compassion, not our condemnation.

[10 : 17] Proverbs 14.20 says this, The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich man has many friends. Proverbs 19.4 says, Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend.

See, these Proverbs, they're actually pointing out something grossly sinful in our hearts as human beings. If we aren't careful, we can be just like that.

And you know what that does? It piles on disdain, shame, and isolation to people who are already suffering from poverty. You know, it's pretty nuts how easily we can kick a guy while he's down. You don't even have to show up to do it.

In fact, often it's our lack of presence. That can be just as harmful as a condescending attitude. You know, contrast this with Jesus' teaching and loving our neighbors, right?

He gave parables about the Good Samaritan. So instead of being the Good Samaritan that shows up and helps out and does what he can do, we are probably more good about saying, I see you and turning our back and walking away, turning a blind eye to the poor and the impoverished around us.

[11 : 23] Instead of hearing the cry of the poor, we ignore it. And we have to realize, man, what this Proverbs is saying, man, the poverty of the poor often makes them targets of disdain in the sinful world that we live in.

Think about this, guys. Think about this. Our nation spends more money on tabloids and entertainment that pay attention to the rich and famous than we do on charities that help the poor.

Think about that. We, as a nation, are more attentive to the thoughts and musings of our celebrity class, our political class, our powerful class, than we are to the cries of the poor.

Now let's stop and think about that for a second. Let's let that soak in. Does that sound like what Jesus did when he was here walking this earth?

Does that sound like Jesus at all? Now, I just want to say I'm preaching to myself here. I really struggle with being judgmental toward the poor. I'm quick to think that it's all on them.

[12:29] They probably deserved it, which is why I don't really do much to help them out, to be perfectly honest. And that's to my own discredit. I'm confessing that to you here. I have to repent of that to you as your pastor, and I have to repent that also to God as well.

And I've done that. That's just not good spiritual leadership for the church. Now, or my family, actually, or as a husband or a father. Now, thank goodness God is patient and gracious towards me.

And without his help, you know what? I'd never changed from being the guy that was described there in Proverbs that turned his back on his neighbor and disliked the poor and deserted them. But you know what? God is so good.

He's been faithfully just over the past few months just massaging this into my heart time and time again. And then I get to this sermon. I'm just like, well, God, you're really doing something here. I'm listening.

You got my attention. And what's good about this, I'm not feeling guilt or condemnation about that. I'm feeling stirred by the Holy Spirit to actually do something. And I picked up the phone this week.

[13:32] A guy had reached out to me. I can't say I reached out to Amy Rashmi first, a guy from RCS. It's a place that helps out the poor and the needy in our region. And so I'm going to go.

I'm going to walk RCS. I'm going to find out what they do. And you know what? I'm not only going to do that, I'm going to find out how I can help. I want to be someone who is able to do something to help the poor and be around them and be present with them and minister to them.

I want to see how our church can help the poor in our region. But me, personally, as a guy who can help the poor in a region, not just with support, but with my presence as well.

See, the poor, they need our support along with our sympathy. Proverbs 19, 17 says this, And finally, Proverbs 14, 21 says, And the Bible calls us.

To help the poor. But can I challenge us in what these Proverbs are saying? It says, don't let your help be lacking. Let it be generous. It's like the way they help them isn't being stingy.

[14:57] It's being generous. We're helping them abundantly. Now, am I saying, hey, let's go out and just give away a ton of money? Well, not necessarily.

Now, if God leads you to do that, hey, I'm not going to say don't do that, but that's between you and him and how he leads you. But I started out this sermon with defining poverty on purpose.

See, when it comes to our help, we have to see that it's more than just giving money. Here's the thing. Poverty is, yeah, it's an economic reality and that, but you know what it does?

It crushes people's souls as well. It can make them hopeless. It can fill them with shame. It can rob them of their intrinsic dignity as God's image bearers, people made in the image of God.

And money alone, throwing money at that can't solve those problems. In their book, *When Helping Hurts*, these two guys, Steve Corbett and Brian Fickert, they kind of did a bunch of research.

[15:54] And they realized that, man, trillions of dollars over the past decades have been sent to impoverished countries. And actually, you know what? Hardly anything has changed with the poverty rate in those countries, despite the trillions of aid that has gone there.

And so through their research, they discovered that, man, poverty is more than an economic problem you can just throw money at. It's a theological problem. Think about it. Before sin made poverty a possibility and a reality in God's creation, God gave mankind a mission to fill the earth and subdue it.

So we started out with this blessed gift from God that we have dominion over all of creation. We were made in God's image. We have this dignity and worth and value.

We were equipped and blessed by our maker with talents to go and do the mission that he had ascribed to us to do. And then poverty, what it does, man, it robs us of all that.

It reminds us that we live in a fallen world and it darkens our minds and our souls to make us feel devalued. It can cause people to self-loathe. They think that, you know what? I am hopeless.

[17:04] I don't have what it takes to get out of this at all. And it turns people into hopeless victims. That is a reality. Poverty is a narrative that speaks to the soul of people that keeps them enslaved to this false gospel.

That is why poverty is often cyclical. Poverty often begets poverty. You could see that. And until people's soul and mind are rebuilt and renewed through the gospel, they're all too often really, they

can't get themselves out of poverty.

There's this poverty mindset. There's this poverty thing that happens in our hearts that keeps us there. And this is, guys, this is where the church can shine all the more.

We can do so much better. Along with being generous with our money toward the poor, we can be generous with our time and with the truth of the gospel. And when I say we, I really do mean we.

This isn't one person's role in the church, right? We don't just step back and say, well, let's just leave that to the ministry, the mercy ministry leader person, you know? They'll do that part for us. No, this is all of us together.

[18:13] Poverty is combated through community. When you look at the early church, there was a strong community. There was a strong sense of community, a strong reality of community, actually. And as a church member, you were counted in the church, but you were counted on.

As a significant participant and player in the church, Acts 4.32 says, Now, the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul. And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own.

Man, that is a tough one for me to wrap my head around. I like, I like, look at that and I said, well, what does that really mean? No, still hasn't changed. No one said that any of the things they had belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

You know, Proverbs talks about being generous to our neighbors. In the early church, they had this kind of community where nobody was holding back their stuff.

They didn't think that it belonged to them. And here's the thing, guys. There's a theological reality to this. You know, we either think of ourselves as owners or stewards. An owner believes everything I have, I earned for myself.

[19:25] Therefore, it belongs to me. I am self-sovereign. I get to determine what I do with everything I have. Or stewards say, everything belongs to God.

And everything I have is because he's enabled me to have it. He's given it to me. And therefore, I am a steward of all these things. And they're not my own.

And he gets to determine how I use them. See the major difference there? There's ownership or there's stewardship. And the Bible is very clear. We are stewards through and through and through.

And that's how you can get to that place. In Acts 4.32, it says, man, they had all things in common.

That is a tough thing. Having all things in common. Man, we care for the poor.

We care for the widow. We care for the orphan. We care for the weak. We care for the needy.

Those that are isolated and alone and vulnerable. We are driven to help those that are vulnerable and powerless.

[20:24] Because here's the thing, guys. We realize that in the gospel, all of us are poor and powerless. Christians realize that they have more in common with the poor than with the rich.

Jesus said, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. What did he mean? What was he getting at? He's saying, man, salvation isn't for the ignorant. It's not for the proud in spirit.

It's not for those who believe that they are rich in their own righteousness. It's for those that recognize they are in spiritual poverty. It is for those who realize they not only have a righteousness deficit, but they have no way of providing a way to be righteous themselves.

They cannot create their own righteousness, right? Poverty. You and I, spiritually, we are in poverty. Help had to come from outside of us.

But our neighbors can't help with that type of poverty. So God himself had to come. And you know what he did? He came in the flesh. God showed his compassion by becoming poor with us and for us.

[21:34] Jesus put on flesh and moved into the neighborhood. He moved into our neighborhood. He didn't come as a rich man. He came humbly. He came poor. He came as a man of very few means.

He wasn't born in a palace. He was born in a barn with a bunch of animals. He wasn't raised in the privilege of wealth. He was from Nazareth, a place of indignity.

People would say, has anything good ever come out of Nazareth? People would call him Jesus of Nazareth, not as a moniker of like, ooh, look how good you are. Man, they were putting him down when they said that.

Jesus from Nazareth? And yet, despite all this, he wasn't destitute. He wasn't hopeless. He wasn't ashamed.

Why? Because he was the son of God. He knew and lived in the love of his father in heaven. And he knew the greatest treasure was to belong to the kingdom of heaven.

[22 : 34] And what a gift. Jesus made the way for us to come into that kingdom by dying for our sins. We who were the impoverished.

We who didn't have righteousness and couldn't obtain righteousness to get into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus did it for us. And we value that.

That is our treasure. God's generosity towards us, abundant, immeasurable, overflowing. It's amazing. And out of that, out of receiving this amazing, lavish grace and mercy and love, when we are rooted in the gospel, it just pours out of us.

We can give generously in love and support to the vulnerable and the powerless around us. Because Jesus did the same for us.

Can you stand with me? I'm going to pray. We'll sing a final song. Let's bow our heads.

[23 : 49] Let's bow our heads.

Let's bow our heads.

you were not the one who looked at our weakness and looked at our poverty and ran away into staying.

You didn't look at us and were disgusted by it. You didn't desert us. You put on our weakness.

You became poor. You walked among us. You showed us what it looks like to love.

[25 : 17] You showed us what justice truly is. Lord, I thank you that you care for the poor. We're all here in this room because you care for the poor.

You care for the poor in spirit. You care for us who can't be righteous according to your righteousness. And yet you didn't abandon us.

You ran to us. Lord, I repent where I have been disdainful towards the poor, where I have judged them, assuming that I know their story.

I pray for all of us in the room. Maybe they can say, yeah, Jess, I get that. I'm in that same place.

Lord, hear our repentance. We thank you that your grace forgives us.

But Lord, may we be moved by the truth of your gospel to watch and look out for and care for the weak and the needy in our midst, but around us as well.

[26 : 40] I pray for those that are here that don't know you, Jesus. My friends in the room, if that's you and you've been trying to earn your righteousness, you feel like you got to do this on your own to get into heaven, I just want to say no, you can't.

Man, give up that fight. Surrender to Jesus. Jesus is holding this out to you. Man, he paid it all. You don't have to pay.

You don't have to earn. He earned it for you in your place by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. And when I ask you, if that's you, surrender to him today. He is calling you to repent and follow him.

Make him your Lord and your Savior. Lord, as we go our way today, I pray this would be a start of conversations we have with our friends in our community groups, husbands and wives talking together, families speaking over the dinner table about this, what this means, the implication of our lives.

And we don't do it to try to get extra credit in heaven. And we do it because of your heart for the poor.

[28 : 08] And we love what you love. Lord, as we respond today, we are so thankful that we serve an amazing God who loves us so much and cares for the poor and the weak.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.