

Kingdom Come Series ©
A Biblical Perspective on Poverty:
Part 1 a pointer to God's glory
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I. Intro

-poverty is not a popular sermon topic. There are 57 million hits when you Google poverty but only 700,000 when you Google 'poverty bible study' but very few appear to be comprehensive studies of the subject.

-the topic brings up all the many unsolvable issues we just don't like- makes us feel guilty, inadequate, sorrowful, anger- its hard to get any warm fuzzies out of the topic because the fact is that all these feelings may be quite appropriate in one way or another. The feelings are inescapable if you want to really talk about the subject.

-so why study the topic? Because God sees it as a significant topic for us to deal with. Much of the Bible is about God's care for the downtrodden, the outcasts, the slaves- 2000 references to the poor and related topics. In some ways you could say the Bible is a record of God dealing with poverty. And after all, once you understand it, poverty is a condition that all men find themselves in at one time or another. **Poverty is a fruit of moral depravity.**

-it is not so much a financial condition as it is a state of existence- a state where an individual finds himself without life, without wellbeing, without relationships that can enable him to achieve these things, and without a grasp of eternal purpose. There is some good writing on the subject of poverty and lots of bad. Humanistic philosophies all lead to the inevitable conclusion that to escape poverty, man must do for himself either as a society or as an individual. With enough knowledge and enough resources, there does not need to be poverty. The problem is that 'teaching a man to fish' doesn't answer the question of why he should go and fish even if he knows how and has the pole in his hand.

-from a biblical point of view, I am impressed that poverty is part of a larger story of God's work in a fallen world communicating a message of love and forgiveness. In fact I hope you will see that poverty even in all its ugliness does nothing but point us all to God and His glory.

-the message tonight is not intended to present the scientific data on the subject or to present philosophical arguments about the nature of poverty. Our purpose is to present as balanced, biblical perspective on the subject and then address the consequences.

II. Review the foundational principles

A. God is sovereign over all material and spiritual dimensions of the universe

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth

Psalms 24:1

¹ The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

Matthew 28:18

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Colossians. 1:15-17

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. *16* For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. *17* He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

B. Despite God's unlimited resources and sovereignty, poverty is a given in this present evil age.

Ephesians 6:12

¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Began at the fall, ends at the eternal kingdom

Proverbs 6:10-11

¹⁰A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, ¹¹so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler and your need like an armed man.

Evil is waiting, all we have to do is do nothing

Matt 26:11

¹¹For you will have the poor with you always but Me you do not have always.

Poverty is part of the natural order of things in this age

I Samuel 2:2, 7-8

²There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no rock like our God. ⁷the Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and He exalts. ⁸He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's. Upon them he has set the world.

Poverty is part of God's order of things in this age

1. We must come to grips with a God who allows poverty for His own glory.
2. Poverty is not an accident of nature or a result of fate. It is part of a larger story in this age when God is allowing opposition.
3. Poverty was not Gods plan but we must understand that it is perfectly incorporated into His plan for demonstrating His love and receiving the glory.

C. The bible portrays the glory of God as a stark contrast to the poverty of man

Ps 103:14-16

¹⁴He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. ¹⁵As for man, his days are like the grass; as flowers of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. ¹⁶But the mercy of the Lord endures forever.

Isaiah 40:22

²²it is God who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

Rom 3:23

²³All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Jer. 17:9

⁹The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart...

1. To understand poverty, our anthropology must be as clear as our theology

D. God in His glory provides solutions for poverty but man has the responsibility to deal with it

1. Transformation is a creative miracle of God

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

1 Corinthians 3:6-7

⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

Titus 3:3-6

³For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our savior toward man appeared, ⁵not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit ⁶whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our savior.

1. money is not the issue- **You can't buy a miracle** and that is what it takes to deal with the problem.
2. no real or lasting change is possible without God
3. sustainability is a matter of God's intervention not ours

Note: next week we discuss the responsibility of man towards poverty

2. But the sufficiency of God as a provider for all mankind makes poverty inexcusable.

Acts 14:17

17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.

Matt 5:45

⁴⁵He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust.

James 1:16-17

16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. *17* Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

1. saying poverty is God's fault is completely misguided
2. by revealing His power and glory, poverty becomes a condition for which man bears the full responsibility.

III. God's mercy towards those who live in poverty

A. God is exalted as He works on behalf of the poor

Isaiah 30:18

¹⁸God exalts Himself to show mercy.

Psalms 35:10

10 My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, O Lord You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them."

Psalms 68:5-6

5 A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. *6* God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing.

Psalms 113:7-9

7 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; *8* he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people. *9* He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the Lord.

Luke 7:20-22

20 When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" *21* At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. *22* So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

John 10:10

10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

1. It is God's choice to use the poor to accomplish His purposes.
2. It brings God glory to raise the poor from the dust as a picture of what he does for us all.

B. In fact, as God works with poor and displays His glory, His kingdom is expanded.

Isaiah 61:1-3

1. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

James 2:5

5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

Luke 6:20-21

20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Luke 1:52-53

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. .

1. Jesus seems to always turn things upside down: the greatest will be the least, the strong will be weak, the first will be last, and now the kingdom is to be built by the outcast.
2. the problem of poverty is addressed by the expansion of the kingdom.

IV. Conclusion for week 1-

A. 5 ways we have got it all wrong about poverty

1. we must focus on poverty so that we can fix it— actually, we must focus on the expansion of the glory of God.
2. eliminating poverty is within our grasp if we just come up with the right ideas— actually, only God can fix the problem and will not do so until His kingdom comes fully. Love, salvation, and justice will not make it go away.

3. poverty is an unfortunate part of the otherwise wonderful story of mankind— actually, poverty is central to the story of God.
4. we are here because we love the poor— actually, we should be here because we love God and respond to the poor in love. We cannot love a concept.
5. we are here because of the needs of the poor-- actually, we should be here because God's glory is not!

B. Be alert to the lessons of poverty- poverty points us all to a loving God whose glory is filling the earth

1. We get to know the Lord in our work with the poor.

Jer. 22:16

(your father) judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. "Was this not knowing me?" says the Lord.

-through the lens of poverty we see ourselves rightly:

We are, in many ways, one of them

We work among the poor in humility realizing God works the same with us

-through the lens of poverty we see the Lord's glory more clearly

God's glory is magnified for the good of all

God wants to deal with us the same as He does the poor

2. We must be careful that a passion for the glory of God drives us to mercy for the poor rather than compassion alone.

- compassion alone is not enough

-our efforts must be in line with the larger story of God's glory.

-the resources are all around us to deal with poverty

-we have the opportunity to participate in the plan of God to demonstrate His glory to all the earth

3. Poverty points us to the glory of God; His sufficiency, His love, His grace for us all. If all you see is the ugliness of poverty you are missing the key part of the picture.

How does God ask us to respond?

Godly compassion- what is it?

How do we intervene appropriately?

What are the specific challenges to those of us who have plenty?

Learn how the principles of faith, love, and hope guide us in our work with the poor.