

## POVERTY AND THE POOR

### **Lesson 1 - IS LAZARUS STILL POOR WITH SO MANY RICH CHRISTIANS ALL AROUND HIM?**

#### I. Introduction.

This eight-lesson adult Sunday school series will expose and perhaps educate us as to:

(1) the reality of poverty in the world and illustrate how it may be a tool to oppress victims of poverty; and

(2) hopefully equip us as Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ to recognize and understand how God views the poor and how we – as Jesus’ disciples - should view and understand the poor and poverty.

Can and should we do more than just talk about loving our neighbor, or, in other words, do we do unto others as we would have them do unto us? **[Matthew 7:12]** Hundreds of Biblical texts teach that God wants every person and family to have equality of economic opportunity, at least to the point of having access to the basic resources that allow us to live.

Question(s) for Discussion:

1. What is the Biblical perspective of being poor?
2. What is the Biblical perspective of poverty?
3. What is the Biblical perspective of our attitude toward possessions?

#### II. WHY IS LAZARUS STILL POOR WITH SO MANY RICH CHRISTIANS ALL AROUND HIM?

Are there “haves” and “have nots”?

Was this a societal condition in Jesus’ day? What about in the Old Testament times, and what about today?

It is a problem today in “3<sup>rd</sup> world countries”, certainly, but what about the USA, Oklahoma, and Tulsa? Perhaps “Lazarus” is poor because we don’t realize that he has no food, that he is hungry, cold, ignorant and lacking the basics of warmth and shelter.

Are many of our “neighbors” poor? [may discuss “who is our neighbor”]

Jesus was told that his good friend Lazarus was dead. With this knowledge, Jesus was convicted to do what he could to change the desperate condition of his friend. If we are informed of the plight of our poor neighbors, should we be convicted, as Jesus was, to change their desperate condition of poverty? But wait, you may say, Lazarus was Jesus’ friend – none of my friends and neighbors are poor? Really? Even so, Jesus also raised others from the dead, and the *Good News* is that he has prepared a way for our resurrection too. And, Jesus fed the poor, freed the oppressed, and healed the sick; many of

whom were persons that were not his “friends” and some were not even known to him (Jesus of Nazareth).

As Americans are we truly wealthy? YES!

From the world’s perspective we certainly are. The middle class North American has, by definition, a roof over his/her head, daily food, adequate clothing to protect from the elements, fresh water, sewer and electricity. But does that make them wealthy or rich? Yes again.

In the history of the world, having those basic necessities makes that person *fabulously rich*, and that is still true - even today. As of December 2017, the world’s population is estimated to be 7.6 billion souls. Of that, 1.2 billion people (16%) are desperately poor: *i.e.*, no furniture in their dwelling place (which is typically a tent or a shack or a bridge/overpass) except for a kitchen table, a wooden chair and a few old blankets; one (1) set of clothes for each family member, one (1) pair of old shoes (for head of family only); a box of matches, a small bag of flour, some sugar, salt, a few moldy potatoes, a handful of onions, and a dish of dried beans for food each day; no clean running water, sewer line or electricity; no medical care; a school 3 miles away that they can walk to on dirt roads; and, a cash life savings (reserve) of \$5.50. The world Bank estimates that these of our neighbors are trying to survive on \$1.25 (US dollars) or less per day.

Another thirty one percent (31%) of the world’s population today struggles in near poverty with little hope for a decent life – *i.e.*, a life with a sound roof over his/her head, a daily meal (food), and clothing including shoes and a coat. The World Bank estimates that these folks live on \$2.50 (US dollars) per day. That means that *just under 50% of the world’s population are currently living on \$2.50 or less per day.*

What about the USA? What about Tulsa? [ask the class].

[See Oklahoman slide: “Homelessness Rises Across the State” - Oklahoman 12.08.17]

[See Oklahoman Slide: “Stocks Lift Wealth” - Oklahoman 12.08.17]

Have and have nots -- how come our homelessness is rising in a time of stock market prosperity in a “Christian nation”?

Has anybody seen a homeless man/woman in Tulsa? Has anybody visited John 3:16 mission? Has anybody visited the Salvation Army or Daycare for the Homeless in “North” Tulsa? How many of you have visited Eugene Fields Elementary in “West” Tulsa? How often? Are there poor people in those places?

Next week --

## **LESSON 2: GOD IDENTIFIES WITH THE POOR (Part I)**

Is God on the side of the homeless man, woman or child?

## POVERTY AND THE POOR

### Lesson 2 - GOD IDENTIFIES WITH THE POOR (Part I)

#### I. Introduction.

Last Week (Lesson 1): The objective was to begin the learning process to enable us to (1) realize the reality of poverty in the world and thereby begin to understand how it may be used as a tool to oppress victims of poverty (the poor); and

(2) Having such knowledge, begin to equip us as Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ to recognize and understand how God views the poor and how we – as Jesus’ disciples - should view and understand the poor and poverty.

Remember teachers: This class is not designed to be taught with a lecture format. It is designed and intended to be taught in such a way that the teacher/leader generates a focused discussion on the Bible verses which then allow the class participants to share their views without condemnation. Hopefully, the teacher/leader, by and through the power of the Spirit, will be able to direct the desired revelation so that the class participants obtain *a Biblical world view* toward poverty and the poor.

#### II. In the Old Testament, God Favors the Poor. (The purpose for this lesson is to discuss with expository Bible study the proposition: “In the O.T., is God on the side of the poor, e.g., the homeless man, woman or child?”

First Question(s) for Discussion:

1. What is the Biblical perspective of being poor in the O.T? Can you give examples of verses that come to mind?
2. How did God address poverty?
3. How did God deal with those *who did not* help those who are poor? (note teachers - our goal here is to stir us from the confines and comforts of our North American lives and lifestyles and to be convicted not just to think, but to *act* (think-Acts of the Apostles)).

#### A. Who are the Poor in the Bible? (how are they defined?)

- a. Hebrew (O.T.) words for “poor”:

i. *ani/anaw* – one who is wrongfully impoverished or dispossessed (dispossessed, a verb (past tense): to deprive (someone) of land, property, or other possessions).

ii. *ebyon* – in want, needy, poor; a beggar imploring charity.

iii. *dal* – lean, low, weak, thin; a thin, weakly person.

b. Understanding these word meanings as used in the Hebrew language of the O.T. helps us understand the point of the verses that use the word “poor” in our English translations Bibles. In my opinion, this clearly helps us understand that God views *all poor people* as deserving our charity. In God’s view to do nothing is to *act by omission* to wrongfully oppress and dispossess the poor people. In legal terms, an “act by omission” is the failure to act when one has a duty to act. God has issued to all that legal duty to act to help the poor.

B. Overall Theme and Take-Away Point: *At the very least*, a fair reading and understanding of the Bible is this- the unequal distribution of the blessings of life is not the ideal way of living in the sight of God, nor is it His desire and plan for His Kingdom.

C. Bible Verses to Read and Discuss:

a. *Exodus 6:4, 8; Leviticus 25:13, 23-28.* (God gave Canaan to His people, and, accordingly, the Mosaic Law provided for the general participation of God’s people in the possession/ownership of the land, but it was, is, and always will be God’s. Therefore, ownership was temporary and the **Year of Jubilee** will always come.

b. *Exodus 3:7-8;* (God displayed His power (and His displeasure with oppressors) in the Exodus where he freed oppressed slaves: the poor and oppressed Nation of Israel. How can we be oppressors today?)

c. *Amos 2:6-7, 6:1-13...* (The middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. was a time of political success and economic prosperity. But, behind the façade of economic prosperity and fantastic growth Amos, a prophet of God, saw oppression of the poor, he saw that the lifestyle of the rich was built on the oppression of the poor.

- d. *Isaiah 10:1-4.* (Obviously God abhors oppression and cares for those most easily oppressed.)
  
- e. *Jeremiah 5:26-29.* (The prophet Jeremiah who lived 100 years after the prophet Isaiah, again condemned the wealthy who had amassed riches by oppressing the poor.)
  
- f. *1 Samuel 2:8.* (*God cares for the poor – shouldn't we?*)

[See: 2017-10-19-VIDEO-Rohinga refugees Myramar-Bangladesh.mp4]

**III. Next week --**

**LESSON 3: GOD IDENTIFIES WITH THE POOR (Part II)**

Continued -- Is God on the side of the homeless man, woman or child?

## POVERTY AND THE POOR

### Lesson 3 - GOD IDENTIFIES WITH THE POOR (Part 2)

#### I. Introduction.

##### Last Week (Lesson 2):

(1) The objective was to begin the more in-depth Bible study to give us a foundation from passages of the O.T. to determine, generally, if God is “on the side of” the poor;

(2) This should allow us to determine if it is fair to state, that at least in some circumstances, poverty can be used as a tool to oppress victims of poverty (the poor); and

(2) Having such knowledge, are we prepared to equip ourselves as Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ to recognize and understand how God views the poor and how we – as Jesus’ disciples - should view and understand the poor and poverty, and then act accordingly.

Remember teachers: This class is not designed to be taught with a lecture format. It is designed and intended to be taught in such a way that the teacher/leader generates a focused discussion on the Bible verses which then allow the class participants to share their views without condemnation. **It is my prayer** that you, the teacher/leader, by and through the power of the Spirit, will be able to direct the desired revelation so that the class participants obtain *a Biblical world view* toward poverty and the poor.

#### II. In the Old Testament, and in the New Testament (the Incarnation), Does God Favor the Poor, Identify with the Poor, and Choose the Poor as His Special Instruments?

##### First Question(s) for Discussion:

1. Does God Favor the Poor? (e.g.s from the Bible?)
2. Does God Identify with the Poor? (what does it mean to “identify” with a person or group of people? Are there Bible verses that indicate such an identification of God with poor folks?)
3. Are there examples in the Bible that show that God uses the poor to accomplish His purposes as His Special instruments?

#### A. The New Testament (The Incarnation)

- a. Christians believe that in Jesus of Nazareth God revealed Himself most completely. Therefore, Bible Study should be predicated on this context to best understand God’s work and God’s view of the world.
- b. Jesus defined His mission when he was reported as teaching (at the beginning of His ministry) (Luke 4:14-20 (NET)):

**[The Beginning of Jesus’ Ministry in Galilee]**

14 Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and news about him spread throughout the surrounding countryside. 15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by all.

16 Now Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
 because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.  
 He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
 and the regaining of sight to the blind,  
 to set free those who are oppressed,  
 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to tell them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read.”

- c. These words, read by Jesus from the Prophet Isaiah, about the Messiah (Him), express hope for the poor and oppressed. They express His mission as His mission to free the poor and the oppressed.
  - i. Question – is this solely a “spiritual” poverty, or is it real and material poverty also?
- d. John the Baptist – in prison, wanted to know if Jesus was the REAL MESSIAH. Jesus sent back this message to John -- 11:2-6 (NET)):

### [Jesus and John the Baptist]

"2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds Christ had done, he sent his disciples to ask a question: 3 "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" 4 Jesus answered them, "Go tell John *what you hear and see*: 5 *The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them.* 6 Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." "(emphasis added).

Question – was Jesus ministry only spiritual? Or also material?

- e. Take away – at this central time, at this central place – God was proclaiming the Good News -- "*The Kingdom of God is at Hand*" (here and now).

#### B. God Identifies with the Poor: [read and discuss the following to see if they indicate that God *Identifies* with the poor]:

- a. Proverbs 14:31 and 19:17
- b. Leviticus 12:6-8 & Luke 2:24
- c. Matthew 2:13-15
- d. Matthew 8:20
- e. Paul's interpretation – 2 Corinthians 8:9
  
- f. The Poor are Special Instruments Used by God for His Kingdom Purposes
  - i. *God' selected a chosen people* -- the oppressed slaves: the poor and oppressed Nation of Israel.
  - ii. *Paul is amazed at the type of people God called into His Church—*1 Corinthians 1:26-29.
  - iii. Similarly – James 2:1-7.

### II. *Next week* --

#### **LESSON 4: ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND FELLOWSHIP – THE APOSTLES MODEL JESUS**

[Did the Apostles and Jesus really "out socialize" what we know today as the socialists?]

## POVERTY AND THE POOR

### **Lesson 4 - ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND FELLOWSHIP – THE APOSTLES MODEL JESUS [Did the Apostles and Jesus really “out socialize” what we know today as the socialists?]**

#### **I. Introduction.**

##### Last Week (Lesson 3):

The objective was to have an in-depth Bible study to give us a foundation from passages of the to demonstrate that God *identifies* with, *favors*, and *uses* the poor, and the oppressed and dispossessed to accomplish the Kingdom of God.

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#### **II. God’s New Law and Our Duty and Response.**

##### A. The Law as Given by Jesus and Interpreted by a Lawyer, Paul.

This understanding should allow us to be less confident in our status as part of the rich and influential in this world and, hopefully, humble ourselves in order to keep God’s law – [read with class] --

“In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets”. Jesus teaches us the “Golden Rule” – the last and only law for those *in Christ*. Matthew 7:12.

*See also, Paul’s Letter to the Romans—*

“So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you could be joined to another, to the one who was raised from the dead, to bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful desires, aroused by the law, were active in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the law, because we have died to what controlled us, so that we may serve in the new life of the Spirit and not under the old written code.” [Romans 7:4-6.]

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“Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet,” (and if there is any other commandment) are summed up in this, “Love your neighbor as

yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.” [Romans 13:8-10].

Questions for discussion –

1. If we are to treat “others” as we want to be treated would we not want to be fed if we are hungry, have shelter if we are homeless, freed if we are oppressed and enslaved?
2. Who are the others and neighbors that are mentioned by Jesus and Paul?
3. If this is the law, do we have a duty to obey it?

B. How the Apostles, having such knowledge, are we prepared to Act as Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ.

Question: Is it true that: in order to recognize and understand how we, as Christians, should view and understand the poor and poverty, should we and study and then model ourselves after the actions of Jesus and those of His disciples?

1. How did the disciples of Christ act toward each other and “others” and “neighbors” after Christ ascended? Examples?
2. How did Jesus act and teach? Examples?
3. Bibles verses to read and discuss--

Luke 10:25-37

Acts 5:1-11

Acts 6:1-3

Acts 11:27-30

Matthew 25: 31-46

See,

<http://www.tehelka.com/2017/11/starving-kids-the-worst-assault-on-humanity/>

and attached, articles and editorials.

**III. *Next week --***

**LESSON 5: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY TO US ABOUT OUR POSSESSIONS? (Part I)**  
**[Danger, Danger, and more Danger]**

## POVERTY AND THE POOR

### Lesson 5 -

### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY TO US ABOUT OUR POSSESSIONS? (Part I) [Danger, Danger, and more Danger]

#### I. Introduction.

##### Last Week (Lesson 4):

The objective was to have an in-depth Bible study and discussion to determine if Jesus and the Apostles provide us with a “model” or “example” of how we are to govern ourselves. If so, then does that model include how we act towards others -- Our so-called “Neighbors”?

Based on what they did and said, Jesus and the Apostles (His disciples) appear to have been “socialist” with respect to their concept of distribution of wealth and property. Did Jesus really “out socialize” what we know today as the “socialists”?

See also, “The Destitution of Service,” Oswald Chambers - My Utmost For His Highest

Feb 25<sup>th</sup> Devotion “... Jesus Christ actually “out-socialized” the socialists. He said that in His kingdom the greatest one would be the servant of all (see **Matthew 23:11**). The real test of a saint is not one's willingness to preach the gospel, but one's willingness to do something like washing the disciples' feet— that is, being willing ... <https://utmost.org/the-destitution-of-service/>

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#### II. **God's View of Wealth and Possessions.**

##### A. Is it spiritually “dangerous” to be rich?

By now in this lesson series we all should be less confident in our status as part of the rich and influential in this world (which we all are at FUMC). Our so-called financial security - that the world says we need and should have – (a 401K, big bank account, high salary, etc.), may be, in the REALITY of God's Kingdom, the stumbling block that prevents our being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It may also surprise us

that we will be judged as “good or bad” stewards and as knowing or not knowing Jesus by how we distribute God’s blessings to us.

“In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets”. Jesus teaches us the “Golden Rule” – the last and only law for those *in* Christ. Matthew 7:12.

Therefore, in Court, we shall be judged by our compliance with that law (above):

Matthew 25:31-46 (New English Translation) -- The Judgment (Jesus is speaking privately with His disciples):

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. <sup>34</sup> Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

<sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ <sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, ‘I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me.’ <sup>41</sup> “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels! <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup> Then they too will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not give you whatever you needed?’ <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, ‘I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.’ <sup>46</sup> And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

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Question for discussion –

1. We who say and claim to be “Christians”, “Evangelicals”, “Born-again” or “United Methodist”, or say the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles Creed, are we exempt from this judgement?

B. Does God Cast Down the Rich – Regardless?

1. The Song of Mary or Mary’s Magnificat (Hymn of Praise) – Luke 1:46-53 (New English Translation):

<sup>46</sup>And Mary said,

“My soul exalts the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and my spirit has begun to rejoice in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup>because he has looked upon the humble state of his servant. For from now on all generations will call me blessed, <sup>49</sup>because he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name; <sup>50</sup>from generation to generation he is merciful to those who fear him. <sup>51</sup>He has demonstrated power with his arm; he has scattered those whose pride wells up from the sheer arrogance of their hearts. <sup>52</sup>He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up those of lowly position; <sup>53</sup>he has filled the hungry with good things, and has sent the rich away empty.”

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2. Hanna’s Song - 1 Samuel 2:2-8 (New English Translation):

“2 No one is holy like the Lord!

There is no one other than you!

There is no rock like our God!

3 Don’t keep speaking so arrogantly,

letting proud talk come out of your mouth!

For the Lord is a God who knows;

he evaluates what people do.

4 The bows of warriors are shattered,

but those who stumble find their strength reinforced.

5 Those who are well-fed hire themselves out to earn food,

but the hungry no longer lack.

Even the barren woman gives birth to seven,

but the one with many children withers away.

6 The Lord both kills and gives life;

he brings down to the grave and raises up.

7 The Lord impoverishes and makes wealthy;

he humbles and he exalts.

8 He lifts the weak from the dust;

he raises the poor from the ash heap

to seat them with princes

and to bestow on them an honored position.

The foundations of the earth belong to the Lord,

and he has placed the world on them.”

See also, James 5:1, 3-5; Psalms 10:2-18; and Jeremiah 5:26-29.

Questions for discussion –

- a. Has God actually worked history to cast down some rich/powerful people? Examples?
- b. Does God regularly cast down wealthy people?

It appears that that is the case in two (2) situations:

- a. When the person became wealthy by oppressing the poor (slavery, low wages, etc.); and
- b. When they fail to share with the needy.
- c.

**III. Next week --**

**LESSON 6: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY TO US ABOUT OUR POSSESSIONS? (Part II)**

*"I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing." --Genesis 12:2*

## POVERTY AND THE POOR

### Lesson 6

#### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY TO US ABOUT OUR POSSESSIONS? (Part II) [Danger, Danger, and more Danger]

##### I. Introduction.

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##### II. Last Week and This Week (Part II of God's View of Wealth and Possessions):

The objective was and is to have an in-depth Bible study and discussion to determine if God has a point of view concerning wealth and possessions, and if so what do you believe that view is?

I believe, based on my study in this area over the last 3 years, that *Matthew 25:31-46* applies to *all people* – not just the so-called “non-believers” or those “left behind” or .... As such, Jesus was clearly speaking to people who *believed* they were righteous – the “believers-of-the-day” so to speak. The take away is that “talk is cheap”, you can’t just “talk the talk”, you must also be “walking the walk” *in Christ* and using the power of God’s Grace to have the desire and the power and understanding *to do*: Feed the poor, lift up and defend the oppressed, give shelter to and welcome the refugee.

See also, 1 John 3:17-18: “But whoever has the world’s possessions and sees his fellow Christian in need and shuts off his compassion against him, how can the love of God reside in such a person? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but [in] deed and [in] truth.” (NET)

**“God’s word teaches a very hard, disturbing truth. *Those who neglect the poor and oppressed are really not God’s people at all*—no matter how frequently they practice their religious rituals nor how orthodox are their creeds and confessions”** (emphasis in the original). Sider, “Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger” ©2005 Thomas Nelson Publisher.

**III. Is it “dangerous” to be rich, insofar as the rich man or woman is *less likely* to be walking with God and hearing His voice and obeying His commands???**

Answer – Yes.

I did not make that judgement, that was Jesus’ assessment of all of us, as fallen creation:

Now someone came up to him and said, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to gain eternal life?” He said to him, [Jesus speaking] “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

“Which ones?” he asked. Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “I have wholeheartedly obeyed all these laws. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” But when the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he was very rich.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God.” Matthew 19:13-24 (NET)

Questions:

1. What was it that the rich young ruler really lacked?
2. What do you suppose was the *real love* of his life? (wealth and possessions)
3. Was he an idolater? What was he ideal?
4. Are we prepare to give up all of are possessions and positions in order to follow Him?
5. If not, are we idol worshippers also?

This is shocking stuff. Indeed, the disciples were astonished. Yet, the answer is so simple its hard – man can’t give it up, but God, through Christ, can give man the strength and desire to leave all for Him who left all for us:

The disciples were greatly astonished when they heard this and said, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and replied, “This is impossible for mere humans, but for God all things are possible.”

Then Peter said to him, “Look, we have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth: In the age when all things are renewed, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And whoever has left houses or brothers or sisters or

father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

But many who are first will be last, and the last first. Matthew 19:25-30. (NET).

Questions: Is it possible, being in the likeness of Christ, that we could not only give, but give joyously?

Examples?

**III. Next week --**

**LESSON 7: SOCIAL EVIL, OPPRESSIVE SOCIETIES AND CLASS STRUCTURES**

**[How are the poor oppressed and poverty perpetuated?]**

*"I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing." --Genesis 12:2*

## POVERTY AND THE POOR

### Lesson 7

#### SOCIAL EVIL, OPPRESSIVE SOCIETIES AND CLASS STRUCTURES

[How are the poor oppressed and poverty perpetuated? Answer – we are the problem.]

#### I. Introduction.

Remember teachers: This class is not designed to be taught with a lecture format. It is designed and intended to be taught in such a way that the teacher/leader generates a focused discussion on the Bible verses which then allow the class participants to share their views without condemnation. It is my prayer that you, the teacher/leader, by and through the power of the Spirit, will be able to direct the desired revelation so that the class participants obtain a Biblical world view toward poverty and the poor.

#### Last Week –

It is “dangerous” to be rich, insofar as the rich man or woman is less likely to be walking with God and hearing His voice and obeying His commands.

I did not make that judgement, that was Jesus’ assessment of all of us, as fallen creation.  
Matthew 19:13-24 (NET)

**“God’s word teaches a very hard, disturbing truth. *Those who neglect the poor and oppressed are really not God’s people at all—no matter how frequently they practice their religious rituals nor how orthodox are their creeds and confessions*”** (emphasis in the original). Sider, “Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger” ©2005 Thomas Nelson Publisher.

#### II. Selfishness, Structural Injustice and Economic Oppression

Preliminary Questions:

1. Are some systems of government more oppressive than others?
2. What do you suppose is the best economic system?
3. Why?
4. What are the goals of economic systems? What should they be?
5. Should there be economic equality?
6. Should all people have a right to basic necessities including healthcare? Should Christians advocate that “right”.
7. What does the Gospel teach us about ensuring that our neighbors have the necessities for life?
8. Does the Gospel require that we not only give, but also stand against those people and institutions that oppress?

9. Is greed good?

**A. God requires radically transformed economic relationships.**

Sin has alienated us from God and from each other, (thus causing us to sin by oppression and injustice toward others). Therefore, does God require that those who “know His name” change individually, and be a means to change their society and eliminate oppression?

We may not be the “cause” of caste, or slavery, or poverty, but will we nevertheless be held accountable for our actions, *or inaction*, in the face of such injustices?

Is that us why God thundered again and again through the O.T. prophets that if we live in a society that fosters or even encourages mistreatment of the poor and disadvantaged He outraged, and He will punish those nations.

Reluctant Prophets - Book of Jonah. An example of a reluctant-resistant prophet who nevertheless accomplished God’s purposes for the people of Nineveh and caused them to repent is Jonah. Are we a *type of Jonah* when it comes to calling people to account for injustice? Remember, God is longsuffering, but He will not look the other way. Accounts will be settled as seen over and over in the Bible.

First Step -- Our Witness - John 17:20-23:

Jesus Prays for Believers Everywhere

“I am not praying only on their behalf, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their testimony, that they will all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. I pray that they will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me. The glory you gave to me I have given to them, that they may be one just as we are one— I in them and you in me—that they may be completely one, so that the world will know that you sent me, and you have loved them just as you have loved me.”

Can people *know* we are Christians by our response to inequality and injustice and oppression? Is that a stronger witness than our “talk”?

Do we want Jesus to pray that prayer for us?

**B. God’s Judgement on Systems that Oppress – His Judgement Includes His People and such oppressive systems.**

Amos 2:6-7: [The Lord Declared through His prophet Amos to “his people” the nation of Israel]

“This is what the Lord says:

“Because Israel has committed three covenant transgressions— make that four! —I will not revoke my decree of judgment. They sold the innocent for silver, the needy for a pair of sandals. They ramble on the dirt-covered heads of the poor; they push the destitute away. A man and his father go to the same girl; in this way they show disrespect for my moral purity.”

Discussion - Taken from Barnes' Notes on the Bible for these verses in Amos –

The Divine judgement rests on God's people for four (4) transgressions of Israel (land of the 10 tribes), the prophet numbers four classes of sins, which run into one another, as all sins do, since all grievous sins contain many in one, yet in some degree are still distinct:

- (1) Perversion of justice;
- (2) oppression of the poor;
- (3) uncleanness;
- (4) luxury with idolatry.

They sold the righteous for silver - It is clear from the opposite statement, "that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes," that the prophet is not speaking of judicial iniquity, but of actual buying and selling. The law allowed a Hebrew who was poor to sell himself, and a Hebrew to buy him until the year of release; yet this too with the express reserve, that the purchaser was forbidden to "serve himself with him with the service of a slave, but as a hired servant and a sojourner stroll he be with thee" [Leviticus 25:39-40](#). The thief who could not repay what he stole, was to "be sold for his theft" [Exodus 22:2-3](#). *But the law gave no power to sell an insolvent debtor. It grew up in practice.*

The sons and daughters of the debtor [Nehemiah 5:5](#), or "his wife and children" [Matthew 18:25](#), nay even the sons of a deceased debtor [2 Kings 4:1](#), were sold. Nehemiah rebuked this sharply. In that case, the hardness was aggravated by the fact that the distress had been fomented by usury. But the aggravation did not constitute the sin. It seems to be this merciless selling by the creditor is what Amos rebukes. The "righteous" is probably one who, without any blame, became insolvent. [ e.g., a person born into poverty and illiteracy].

The "pair of shoes," that is, sandals, express the trivial price, or the luxury for which he was sold. They had him sold "for the sake of a pair of sandals," that is, in order to procure them. Trivial in themselves, as being a mere sole, the sandals of the Hebrew women were, at times, costly and beautiful ([Ezra 10](#); [Judith 16:9](#)). Such a sale expressed contempt for the man, made in the image of God, that he was sold either for some worthless price, or for some needless adornment.

How are our actions similar today?

Is it true that we sin by participating in evil systems when we understand, at least to some degree, that the system displeases God, but we fail to act responsibly to change?

A minor example: Is calling something or someone “politically correct” simply a new way to critique those who call us to account for our unjust or unsympathetic actions? Are these so-called politically correct folks simply being polite and treating others with respect, kindness, etc. as Jesus did and would do? If so, why do we criticize them?

Another example: Advertising and the want of luxury - Advertisers regularly con us into believing that we genuinely *need* one luxury after another. We are convinced that we must keep up with or even go one better than our neighbors.... we buy another dress, sports jacket or sports car and thereby force up the standard of living.

Is the ever more affluent standard of living the god of twenty first century North America and the “adman” its prophet?

### C. Conclusion—

**“If we fail to feed the needy, we do not have God's love, no matter what we say. Regardless of what we do or say at 11am on a Sunday morning, affluent people who neglect the poor are not the people of God.”** Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*.

True or False?

III. *Next week --*

**LESSON 8 - THE POOR PEOPLE ARE OUR NEIGHBORS**  
**(pictures, stories and circumstances of present day poverty)**

***"I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing." --Genesis 12:2***