

## 7. Jesus and Those in Need (3Q 2019—The Least of These)

**Biblical material:** Luke 1:46–55, 4:16–21, 7:18–23, Matt. 12:15–21, Matt. 21:12–16, Mark 11:15–19, Isa. 53:3–6.

### Quotes

- We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty. *Mother Teresa*
- In poverty and other misfortunes of life, true friends are a sure refuge. *Aristotle*
- We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination. *Nelson Mandela*
- In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of. *Confucius*
- Life is a dream for the wise, a game for the fool, a comedy for the rich, a tragedy for the poor. *Sholom Aleichem*
- What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like. *Augustine*

### Questions

How do we avoid seeming “better” than others when helping those in need? What do we learn by sharing our time and resources? What lessons do we learn from Jesus about this? Why is this such an important part of the Christian life? What attitudes should we learn to adopt, and to avoid?

### Bible summary

Luke 1:46–55 is the “Magnificat,” the wonderful “prayer-song” of Mary in response to the angel’s announcement of the birth of Jesus. She reflects her poor background in praising God for honoring her despite her low social status. Jesus too reads from Isaiah that he is bringing good news to the poor (Luke 4:16–21). Similarly in Jesus’ response to John the Baptist’s messengers, he points to what was happening—the healing miracles and the preaching of good news to the poor (Luke 7:18–23). In Matt. 12:15–21 quotes Isaiah, pointing to justice for all. He drove out the money-changers from the Temple because they were exploiting the poor, and healed the blind and lame who came to him (Matt. 21:12–16; see also Mark 11:15–19). Jesus knew what it was like to be discriminated against as an outcast from society (Isa. 53:3–6).

### Comment

As we consider this week those in need, we have to address our fundamental Christian principles. For us as believers, there’s nothing so dangerous as being an inconsistent follower of Jesus, yet we all seem to have that capacity for doing just that, in different ways and at different occasions. We are all capable of revealing discrepancies in our ideals and principles, times when we don’t practice what we preach. But this schizophrenic spirituality that allows us to believe one thing and act quite oppositely will damage us and those around us.

The ways of the world are totally opposed to the ways of Jesus. That's why he spent much time in contrasting the differences—in the Sermon on the Mount for example. Jesus showed that God's value system is very different to ours, and how our way of life if we follow Jesus should be demonstrably different to that of the world. Don't follow the human value system, rather follow the values of God, Jesus tells his hearers. Reject intolerance, spiritual pretense, and material concerns. Do not live your religion ostentatiously, wanting people to see how good you are. Forgive your debtors. Store up heavenly treasure, not the treasure of this world. For your heart is where your treasure is. Don't worry about life.

Jesus places our worldly way of thinking on its head. For in reality it is our value system that is upside-down, for we live in a topsy-turvy world that is in opposition to God. So as Jesus tries to right our wrong-headed view of what is important, as he re-prioritizes life and identifies what is really true and enduring, he speaks his inverse sayings. Throughout his ministry Jesus gave us statements of truth through which he tried to turn our upside-down world the right way up. Only the adoption of Jesus' way and following him will result in a meaningful and worthwhile life.

"Listen to your life," writes Frederick Buechner. "See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. Touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are sacred moments and life itself is grace."

*Life itself is grace.* Only by seeing ourselves as more than a chance formation of random molecules does anything begin to make any kind of sense. Only if our existence has meaning and purpose beyond our immediate selves can we find sanity. Only if life truly is grace is there sense in living and not in ending the meaninglessness. There is no lasting satisfaction in the things we usually chase after for enjoyment—the physical simply does not last, and eventually every earthly pleasure cloy. Ultimately all our grasping after feeling good leaves us empty, unsatisfied.

Recognizing how much more there is, we should invest beyond our materialistic desires in the people around us, particularly those in need. Not to make us feel good, but because we see in everyone a child of God who should be destined for the kingdom.

### **Ellen White Comments**

We lay by for the poor, the suffering, and the distressed. I would call the attention of our brethren especially to this point. Remember the poor. Forego some of your luxuries, yea, even comforts, and help those who can obtain only the most meager food and clothing. In doing for them you are doing for Jesus in the person of His saints. He identifies Himself with suffering humanity. Do not wait until your imaginary wants are all satisfied. Do not trust to your feelings and give when you feel like it and withhold when you do not feel like it. Give regularly... {CCh 280.4}

Although Christ was rich in the heavenly courts, yet He became poor that we through His poverty might be made rich. Jesus honored the poor by sharing their humble condition... The poor should be treated with as much interest and attention as the rich. The practice of honoring the rich, and slighting and neglecting the poor, is a crime in the sight of God. {CH 228-9}

Jesus did not hold himself aloof from the poor, the suffering, and sinful. His great heart of love went out in yearning tenderness for wretched objects who needed his help. {2SP 157.1}

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