



SESSION 3: GOSPEL IN COMMUNITY

OUR VIEW OF THE POOR VS. GOD'S VIEW OF THE POOR

MAIN TEXT:

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

(James 2:5-9, NIV)

KEY TEACHING POINT: WE NEED TO SEE THE POOR THROUGH GODS EYES.

OPENING DISCUSSION:

Why do you believe the poor are poor? Examine deep inside your upbringing and motives for your answer. Be sure and be aware of any people in your class that some may consider "poor" as you have this discussion (Spend some time on this one...allow for some discussion on attitudes and HONEST reflection).

OUTLINE: JAMES 2:1-14

- **WORLDS VIEW OF THE POOR: THEY ARE THE REJECTS (1-4)**

My dear brothers and sisters, fellow believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ—how could we say that we have faith in him and yet we favor one group of people above another? 2 Suppose an influential man comes into your worship meeting wearing gold rings and expensive clothing, and also a homeless man in shabby clothes comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the rich man in expensive clothes and say, "Here's a seat of honor for you right up front!" but you turn and say to the poor beggar dressed in rags, "You can stand over here," or "Sit over there on the floor in the back," 4 then you've demonstrated gross prejudice among yourselves and used evil standards of judgment! (TPT)

⇒ How do we as a church handle people as they come into our building?

⇒ What can we do to make people (specifically the poor) from the community feel more comfortable in our building as they come in?

- **GODS VIEW OF THE POOR: THEY ARE THE RICH (5-7)**

5 So listen carefully, my dear brothers and sisters, hasn't God chosen the poor in the world's eyes to be those who are rich in faith? And won't they be the heirs of the kingdom-realm he promised to those who love him? 6 But yet you insult and shun the poor in your efforts to impress the rich! Isn't it the wealthy who exploit you and drag you into court? 7 Aren't they the very ones who blaspheme the beautiful name of the One you now belong to? (TPT)

⇒ How are the poor rich in God's eyes? Why are the poor mentioned so often by Jesus and scripture?

⇒ Why would God choose the poor to show us richness in faith?

• **THE LAW'S VIEW OF THE POOR: THEY ARE THE RESCUED (8-17)**

8 Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** **9** But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.

10 For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. **11** For the same God who said, "You must not commit adultery," also said, "You must not murder." So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.

12 So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. **13** There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.

14 What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? **15** Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, **16** and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

17 So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. (NLT)

⇒ Do we see "favoring some people over others" as a sin? How can you tell? Is it really as bad as adultery and murder?

⇒ What is the "law that sets us free?" How does it fit in with mercy?

⇒ What is our responsibility to the poor when we see them, according to this verse? Does this apply to those who are "taking advantage of the system", or alcoholics, drug addicts, etc.?

FINAL DISCUSSION: (If you have time)

⇒ **How did Jesus handle the poor? What do these verses say about how we should act?**

Read all these verses at one time....

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.'

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 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 welcomed me, 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.'

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'

'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.'

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

Giving a handout causes the expectation of things for free. This then lowers the person's dignity while increasing the poverty level. Caution against paternalism (preview video below prior to teaching this unit if you can).

Questions for the group discussion: When you look on the poor do you think the problem is with their hands or is it a problem in the heart? To provide the right type of relief for poverty, the cause must be adequately assessed. How do you find the cause? Can you commit to a longer term relationship to work with the heart of the person and direct them to the God you know?

Please note, for Hillcrest, part of helping the members with this process of assisting or "going" into the community with the Gospel will be to work with agencies that have internal protections, systems, and clear ways of helping the hurting. Knowing who to direct a person to who asks you for money or specific item will be helpful as well. Someone on the benevolence team can help you with that.

Unit 3: Why Good Intentions Aren't Enough - The Chalmers Center

When giving to others or mobilizing in lesson one, the idea in Luke 10 can be used here— to tell the person, as you are a part of the church of Christ, and that the kingdom of God has come near. The reason we want to and do help others is because of the love of Christ in us. Saying even just the briefest of confessions, that you love God and His Son saved you, is a good first step to plant the seed and therefore express what motivates you to look for others to share this with. In this lesson, keep in mind that the helping is a process: guard against thinking of a product to give, but a heart that is changed— that you can now be set to go out and walk with others as they figure things out versus figuring things out for them. In this video below, which I ask that you watch, you will see the idea of an intellectual doing "good stuff" but not having value if you do not experience an engaging relationship with Christ and others who are different than you. Maurice says that "in your uncomfortableness, you grow."

How do we guard against ambivalent hospitality? (the holding out one hand but with the other hand up preventing closeness) How do we balance going into the world baptizing, teaching commands, and knowing when to walk away that our part of helping in this person's life is finished?

VIDEO: Becoming True Friends - The Chalmers Center

MENTION THIS AT THE END OF CLASS:

For the next three weeks, (March 6, 13, 20) we will meet in the Worship Center and hear about ways we can reach out into the community, hearing from the leaders and volunteers who are already involved in the community. We will then have a Community Ministry Fair in the MPR on March 27th, with many of the community partners we work with. This will be a place to volunteer and get involved, and meet the leadership of each organization.