

"...the Poor Ye have with You Always"

"There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment and poured it on his head but when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always." Matt. 26:7-11

"Always" has been a long time for the poor to be poor. Was Jesus being insensitive to the poor? Was he who came to save the poor concerned about his own comfort above the poor? What did Jesus mean?

The recent Census Bureau announcement revealed a sobering fact about the poor: In the USA the ranks of the poor have reached 35.7 million the highest percent since 1964. The number of the world's poor is also escalating beyond all proportions.

Who are the Poor? Why are they Poor?

The homeless: five to six p.m. is the guiltiest hour of the day in big cities across the country. That is when most working people walk to parking lots, bus stops, or subway stations, heading home. That is when those without homes thrust out their hands in hope of getting quarters or dollar bills before heading back to their shelters or make-shift beds. That is when most of the better-off avoid eye contact with these most visible poor. A recent USA Today headline stated, "For Homeless, Streets are Meaner: Public Fed Up, Frustrated."

The refugees: In the eastern German town of Hoyerswerder, youths chanting nationalist slogans attack an apartment complex filled with refugees. Neo-Nazis break into a refugee home and club an Albanian youth to death. Since German reunification in the fall of 1990, there have been over 2,000 such attacks on foreigners. England's streets see racial attacks on Indian people, while Haitian refugees are turned back from attempts at immigration by the country which says, "Give me your tired, your poor." The war-torn: In Somalia the "poor man's war" has left it in the grip of starvation. The UN is trying to find a way to save more than a million helpless people from staring to death.

The diseased: The devastating impact of AIDS will slam hardest the poor countries that can least afford it because their economies are already so small and their living standards so low. The virus hurts stricken countries by forcing them to divert precious capital from investment to health care. By the year 2000 those expected to have HIV will be 40%.

What Has God Done About the Poor?

Under the Old Testament Law, the poor were to be provided for: "And thou shalt not gather every grape of thy vineyard, thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God." (Lev. 19:10) "And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat." (Ex. 23:10,11) "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." (Deut. 15:11)

The Scriptures say, God loves and hears the poor: "For the Lord heareth the poor." (Psa. 69:33) "For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth: the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence and precious shall their blood be in his sight." (Psa. 72:12-14) "Who is like unto the Lord our God. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy." (Psa. 113:5-7)

But the poor are still poor. When will God raise them "out of the dust"?

When Jesus Walked on this Earth, He Loved the Poor

Jesus read in the temple: "He hath sent me to preach the gospel to the poor." (Luke 4:18) Jesus taught: "Sell that thou hast and give to the poor." (Matt. 19:21) The ones not rich in this world's goods are most often those who are poor in spirit. The first beatitude Jesus taught was, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3) Jesus praised the poor widow who gave all that she had, only a mere two mites.

But Jesus did not help all the poor of Israel. He mostly healed those who came near to hear the Gospel. Did he lack the power to help the rest?

What is Now Being Done for the Poor?

A lot, but with frustration. Many noble efforts have been thwarted by man's selfishness. A 200-ton delivery of U.N. food was hijacked in Mogadishu. "The shooting starts at the exit gate and continues along the way and at the distribution centers" says a worker from the relief agency CARE. The International Committee of the Red Cross has delivered more than 80,000 tons of food to Somalia, but they warn food they are bringing must be more than doubled and they themselves don't have the capacity. Preoccupation with the nationalist's crises in what was formerly Yugoslavia is blamed for the West's failure to act on the needs in Africa.

The Churches are Doing a Social Work Too

The churches are involved in helping the poor on many levels. One Protestant radio program solicited volunteers for the recent Florida hurricane victims: "We need volunteers who know house construction! Fax us your offer to come down and help. Here's the Fax number." The Catholic Church runs a boarding school in Illinois for children who have been variously exploited. Many are street kids, runaways and throwaways, with considerable experience in the most degrading facts of life.

What is the motivation behind the Christian churches, which are trying to help the poor on an organized, concerted basis?

A good part, no doubt, is due to love of fellow man and a noble desire to help. But the other part, no doubt, is a sense of urgency to save souls feeling now is "the only day of salvation." But what about those miserably overdosed drug addicts who slipped through our fingers or the thousands who died in Somalia who never heard of the Name of Jesus or those Moslems who died on the frozen mountains of Iraq. Is God's arm short?

Did Jesus do a Social Work?

Jesus did not engage in a work of uplifting the downtrodden, sick and hungry. Why? What prevented him from taking on that task? Apparently, he had the power. What stopped him? Truly, he had compassion upon them because when he saw the multitudes who had come to hear him, he healed them of all their diseases. So what stopped him from going further?

When Satan tempted Jesus, "If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine" (Luke 4:7). Evidently when Jesus was offered the kingdoms of this world by the tempter, he understood that Satan wanted him to divert his attention from God's plan. The Devil wanted Jesus to cooperate and take his new directions. "Worship" is not the thought of bowing down, but of service to follow Satan's plan. Compromise with the Adversary meant establishing a kingdom without Jesus' having to suffer and die i.e., without the cross. Satan himself did not want a poor sick race. He thought he could make a deal with Jesus to skip the dying on the cross and set up the Kingdom of blessings immediately.

Did Jesus succumb to this temptation? No he did not. Jesus realized that any immediate worldwide program for blessing the poor dying race of Adam would only be temporary, partial and in the end frustrating. By taking the long hard course, was Jesus disinterested in humanity? Of course not! He was soon to give his life fully for the lives of all. Was he shirking the responsibility to help the poor and needy? Not at all!

His commission was to reach the "poor in spirit" with the Gospel to take out from men a "people for his name." Afterwards "the residue of men" would be blessed in the Kingdom (Acts 15:14-17). That is also why Jesus did not ask his disciples

to systematically go through the countryside helping, healing and feeding all the poor. Jesus knew that the time for blessing the world's poor was near but not yet. In the Kingdom, he would not just heal temporarily. He would not only feed a few for a short time. He would not only up lift the spirit of the poor for a day or week or month, but he would feed, heal and comfort the poor with the everlasting blessings of the Kingdom for which he taught us to pray.

"Sell All that thou Hast and Give to the Poor"

But still what did Jesus mean when he said, "Sell all" (Matt. 19:21) That young man he spoke with took him literally and went away sad. We understand that Jesus was asking him to give up all as a sacrifice. He was advised not so much about the care of the poor as about full surrender of his earthly possessions and full submission to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

The lesson for us is that the young man was asked to understand the "spirit of sacrifice," the "spirit of consecration." Jesus was not discussing what to do for the poor, but being ready to relinquish his great possessions even as Jesus did. "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye though his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). To "inherit the Kingdom" one must use his possessions for glory of the Lord. He could no longer cling to them.

Overcoming Materialism

We too cling to our possessions as if we could "take them with us." Jesus told his disciples that he had "no where to lay his head." Jesus had given up his earthly home for the sake of the Gospel. His example was to do those things which would "lay up treasure in heaven," not on earth.

The end-time church is particularly tested with the temptation of materialism and spiritual poverty. "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Many Christians are sucked into the frenzy to acquire material possessions. After all, we live in a society, which makes its living by the sale of material things. So we are bombarded by temptations to see, want, desire and buy.

What is the solution to materialism and spiritual poverty? "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich" in spiritual things! (Rev. 3:18) By "seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven" in all of our choices each day, our hunger for spiritual things increase. Material things lose their taste. We see through them. They are fragile. We must only use our possessions as a means to an end of serving God, not self.

What Poor are we Responsible for Now?

When Jesus scolded the others for chiding Mary's loving gesture, he said, "For ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always." He knew that literally there would be no time for anointing his own body for burial after he died on the

cross. But he was also thinking of his body members needing loving attention and care.

James says (2:15-17) that we should help our "destitute" brother or sister and thus demonstrate our faith by these works. Paul collected money for the "poor saints which are in Jerusalem" who were in straits from famine and persecution (I Cor. 16:1-3; Rom. 15:25,26). By distributing "to the necessity of saints" (Rom. 12:13) we are bestowing of our means on Jesus.

The Poor will Be Always, but not Forever.

When Jesus said "the poor you have with you always," we might still wonder, did he really meant always forever? We think not. Elsewhere, when Jesus was comforting his disciples he promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." We rather think that it is in this sense of until the end of the age that the poor will remain poor. The promised "kingdom of God" will raise the "poor out of the dust" because there will be no politics in distribution. "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper." (Psa. 72:11, 12) There will be no homeless, no refugees, no hungry, no war-torn because the causes of poorness will be removed. "For the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever" (Psa. 9:18).

We believe that the poor will be with us always, but "always" is not forever.

Certainly, you want to know more about this Kingdom which is coming soon. And, certainly, we will send you the book the DIVINE PLAN OF THE AGES. And, if you have already received it from us, please find it and pick it up and read it with your Bible. Certainly, we will be happy to speak with you and hopefully answer questions you might have. Please give us a call, or send for the Book. And, do not stop praying for the Kingdom! It is the complete answer on the poor.