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# MINISTRY TO THE POOR

Jerry D. Porter

- I. God's special interest in the poor
  - A. Proverbs 19:17: helping the poor is like lending to God
  - B. Psalms 41:1: the Lord rescues those who help the poor
  - C. Psalms 9:17-18; the needy will not be forgotten for ever
  - D. Psalms 34:6; the Lord hears my cry for help
  - E. Exodus 3:7-10; Jehovah calls the slave nation "My people"
- II. The prophet's speak on behalf of the poor
  - A. Isaiah 10:1-2; God's judgment will fall on those who abuse the poor
  - B. Amos 8:4-7; God will not forget the wicked who rob the poor and trample the needy
  - C. Ezekiel 22:24-31: the Holy City filled with greed and exploitation was destroyed
- III. God's people serve and defend the poor
  - A. Psalms 82:3-4; rescue the poor and the helpless
  - B. Proverbs 28:27; give to the poor and lack nothing
  - C. Matthew 5:42; give to those who ask and don't turn away
  - D. James 1:27; our Lord's brother taught that pure religion is to care for the widows and orphans
- IV. Jesus identified with and ministered to the poor
  - A. Luke 2:10-12; born so poor they found him in a cattle feeder
  - B. Luke 4:18-19; the gospel is preached to the poor

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The outline of a sermon preached at the Asia-Pacific Region Theological Education Conference, Bangkok, Thailand, January 12, 2003.

- C. Luke 7:20-23; message for John the Baptist that Jesus was preaching to the poor
  - D. Luke 18:22-30; rich young ruler rejected the Kingdom and Jesus taught that it was very difficult for the rich to embrace the Kingdom; like pushing a camel through the “eye of the needle gate”
  - E. Luke 19:8-10; Zaccheus’ encounter with Jesus transformed him into a person who was generous with the poor
- V. The New Testament church was poor
- A. Acts 4:13; they were unlearned simple men who had been with Jesus
  - B. I Corinthians 1:26-29; Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that none of them were highly educated, wealthy, powerful, nor influential before they came to the Kingdom
  - C. James 2:1-9; poor must not be treated as inferior; what church programs exclude the poor in favor of the rich? We must always hold each other accountable challenging church systems that prefer the wealthy and powerful.
- VI. The Church of the Nazarene’s calling to minister to the poor
- A. The Wesley brothers, though highly educated and valuing a well-educated clergy, themselves focused their ministry efforts on the uneducated and the poor. The Wesleys took the Gospel outside the walls of the established, wealthy and highly-educated Anglican churches to England’s streets amongst the coal miners and beggars.
  - B. The first Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles, California focused on reaching and serving the poor. Dr. Bresee emphasized that the poor could sit on the front row in contrast to the mainline churches where “pew rental fees” were used to generate revenue, allowing the poor to sit in the back on the “free pews.” This “Glory Barn” filled with working class poor was such an emotional “show” that it was sometimes included in the L.A. tourist guide as an amusement to see!
  - C. Redemption and lift elevated the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> generation Nazarenes. Our emphasis on higher education has only accelerated this normal process. We “clean up our act,” obtain more education, better jobs, and become more responsible. We urge our children to rise even higher than us economically, educationally,

and socially. This leaves a great vacuum among the poor. We are no longer near them nor desiring to reach them. We are enamored with converts who are highly educated, wealthy, and influential.

- D. To counteract this predictable change of focus and mission we must urge every church to plant daughter churches and ministries among the poor. Rediscovering compassionate ministry to the poor in every community for every cultural group will allow the Church of the Nazarene to reach all of society rather than a narrow particular socioeconomic level. We actually do not minister *to* the poor; we literally *give them the church* for of such is the Kingdom!
- E. The Colombia Nazarene strategy was to first reach the upper class in order to reach the whole nation. The Dominican Republic strategy was to first reach the poor. Eventually the Colombian Nazarene leaders changed their focus and the church has exploded with growth. The upper class will be best evangelized by 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation believers who have themselves become upper class highly educated persons. Our missional priority must be the poor.
- F. In this process no ministerial student can be left behind! The educational institutions cannot simply serve the wealthy justifying this strategy due to pragmatic realities. To be a Kingdom of God institution our schools must find ways of delivering quality theological education to EVERY ministerial candidate. The university system by definition tends to be elitist due to accrediting entrance and graduation requirements. Creative educational/training alternatives must be pursued in concert with the districts and local congregations to make ministerial preparation readily available to all.
- G. Psalms 37:25; is this a promise that guarantees God-followers will always have food or is this King David's testimony of not allowing his eyes to see the righteous forsaken nor their descendants begging for bread? May that also be our testimony.
- H. Educators must instill this concern for the poor in our students, pastors, and laity, not just in theory but in practice, by continually planting churches and training pastors amongst the socio-economic groups below us. In so doing, we will be reflecting God's concern for the poor.