

JUSTICE IS - Poverty and financial injustice

Poverty is not a new concept to us, particularly in SA

- **Globally** there are 736 million people who live in poverty. 8.6% of the world's pop
- 70 Million are on the threshold of poverty every day
- How's this: The infant mortality rate in the poorest 3rd of the world is 14 times higher than the richest 3rd of the world.

What about our context?

The Findings of the Living Conditions Survey 2014/15. Found that **approximately half (49,2%) of the adult population were living below the upper-bound poverty line (UBPL).**

Perhaps that most startling figure is the Gini Co-efficient measurement tool.

This is used to measure inequality in a country. The rating scale goes from 0, being a perfectly equal society, to 1 being a perfectly unequal society. SA finds itself closing in on a 0.7 score.

We find ourselves in that place as a country

DEFINING POVERTY

Poverty globally is roughly defined as those who earn less than \$1.90 a day. The World Bank expands on this and says:

"Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom."

We know the challenges that we live in, we know our dark history, and we've seen the hope of a new dawn. **The are over 2000 verses which deal with responding to the needs of the poor! The question this morning: Is what is our Christian responsibility when it comes to poverty?**

Perhaps one of the earliest accounts of poverty in the Bible was when the Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians:

Deuteronomy 26:6-9

"But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

- The Israelites knew the pain of suffering. But they also knew the goodness of God
- Countless others saw it too. **But** perhaps the most powerful example of what it means to love the poor was given by **Jesus**
- **Think about it:** Jesus was poor and homeless! He understood

2 Corinthians 8:9

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

In fact in the sermon on the Mount alone, there are at least 4 references to the poor. The most known being the beatitudes:

Luke 6:20

²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

The Passion Translation

²⁰ Looking intently at his followers, Jesus began his sermon. "How enriched^[a] you become when you are poor,^[b] for you will experience the reality of God's kingdom realm.

- ⇒ **What's interesting is that it says the poor will receive the Kingdom of God.**
- ⇒ We can think, we'll that's a great promise that those in poverty will be fine for eternity one they depart from this world. But what's the Biblical mandate? How does the Lord's Prayer end? YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE. ON EARTH..

It's one of the great paradoxes of the gospel

- It's the poor he makes rich The weak he makes strong
- The foolish he makes wise The guilty he makes righteous
- The dirty he makes clean The lonely he loves
- The have-nots become the haves

The poor are very much on God's heart, in fact:

- If you've really been changed by the grace of God, it will move you toward the poor.
- Biblical Justice is simple Giving humans their due as people made in the image of God.

Poverty is complex, and it brings a host of issues with it: Oppression. Forgiveness. Depression. Dependency. Unemployment. Corruption. Endless Circle

Causes of Poverty

- **Destructive formative practices** – including questionable theology – prosperity Gospel
- **Broken systems** at both the community and macro levels. At Governing levels, economic desperation which leads to debt circles that are designed to keep people in debt
- **Broken people and society.** Lack of self-worth & identity. Unemployment = Self Worth
- **Demonic forces.** The enemy has strongholds, not only over areas but over mindsets

Can I say this?

If you've been a victim of injustice in any shape or form, and you find yourself in poverty, maybe trapped in poverty, No matter how you feel right now, God's heart is faced towards you. God is close to you. No matter how you were wronged or how you've been treated, he looks to you with compassion, and he is a God who saves!

So what do we do about Poverty, How do we respond?

Galatians 2:10 is a good reminder:

Paul's having a council meeting with some early church leaders. You know what the leaders asked of Paul and Barnabas :

¹⁰ All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

You know what this says to me? Make the poor an essential part of your life and ministry

The reason this can be so hard is that the Christian message in only one of many

- 3000 hours of screen time, including news, Youtube, browsing..
- Church related activities only constituted 300 hours. 1 10th.
- Immersing yourself in the Word will give you heart for the poor

And so what do we do?

1) Keep Destitution And Suffering Before You

Paul Slovic, a psychologist at the University of Oregon. suggests that as statistical numbers associated with a tragedy get larger and larger, we become desensitised and have less of an emotional response to them. We become numb to increasing numbers and our compassion can collapse altogether.

⇒ **Satan will sell us the lie that we the problem is too great to actually get involved**
I can't help but think of Living Hope, you know where I honour John and Avril, is that no matter how many times the enemy has tried to take them out, no matter how big the need was, they have never said no, they have heard Gods voice and walked in it. Impacting one person at a time

⇒ **Above the fear of us falling into poverty, should be the fear of the numbing effect of wealth and riches.** Why because we buy the lie that we don't need God.

© **Ostrich head** in the ground in the ground example

Is it wrong to be wealthy?, no, not at all. It's the LOVE of money that the problem,

⇒ But wealth becomes a issue when it takes away our need for God and creates boundaries between us and the poor. If you're wealthy, confining yourself to the confines of your suburb will never foster a heart for the poor.

Here's the truth of the matter

⇒ **By trying to escape poverty, we're trying to escape from those who God's heart is drawn to the most.**

Neither is the answer for those who have to sell everything and live in voluntary poverty. Because then we can't help lift people out.

⇒ **What we need, is to be discerning and to listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings.**

I often hear people saying how bad they feel at robots, when people stand there begging. It's not for us to feel guilty, but rather as God leads us. If you're walking closely with God, your heart will be softened towards people.

2) Get Involved Somehow

Poverty only becomes real when we get involved in it. Unless we get involved at a relational level, we will only objectify the poor. They will only be a number. It's when you're intentional about forming a relationship with someone who's in need, that your world begins to change.

Poverty is broken through empowering relationships

© **STORY: MASI MAMA Project – Nosiselo (PICS)**

The poor can teach us about generosity. Mississippi is the poorest state in the US, up until a few years ago it was also the most charitable and generous state. See the correlation. Because when you're poor you don't have much to lose

Maybe you're a financial planner and you're wondering what can you do?

Debt management right now is critically NB! You can have a huge role to play.

⇒ If you're battling with financial debt, don't allow yourself to get into more. Don't finance debt with debt. Maybe you have no idea how to get out of it. Chat to us, we have people in our church who can offer you advice.

Care, but also Empower

© **It's easy to turn a blind eye to poverty** when we weren't born into it, but just for a second, imagine that all you had was the clothes on your back, you had no shoes, and you were out on the street. No one stopping to help you, or listen to your story. When things flip, we become desperate. If we aren't willing to empower someone else, then we can't expect someone to be willing to empower us.

For some of us we can offer *relief* for the poor.

We can give finances, clothing, food, out time, etc

Matthew 25:37-40

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Relief progresses into a desire to see *transformation*.

Justice provides for the now, but it also plans for the needs of tomorrow.

Living Hope are doing this extremely well! Training, educating, counselling, imparting skills and bringing hope of a future to destitute people.

3) Let's Deal With The Roots

Address broken systems

- We need to learn to see those living in poverty as our partners in poverty alleviation.
- Don't expect people living in poverty to have the same opportunities you've had?
- We can easily judge the poor on the rubric of what we've had access to.
- It's about being willing to listen to people's stories of why their poverty isn't always their fault.

Address broken people

- So many movements today are a cry for deeper identity. To be known, to be affirmed. Do we see every person as a son or daughter of God. Dearly loved.

Leo Buscaglia – the late US author and motivational speaker said this:

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

Address demonic forces

We need to identify what strongholds are linked to poverty and go after these? What mindsets, what faulty thinking is in place? Demonic strongholds begin with a mistruth about who God is. Faulty thinking leads to us believing a lie and a stronghold is created

Build kingdom community

Be a part of a small group. This is the heart beat and pulse for us. Our small group looks so forward to Wednesday nights, because we're real. When people cancel for small groups regularly, it's probably because they aren't engaged.

Fighting poverty is not an option for us as believers, it's a command

I love this quote by Tony Campolo:

“Jesus never says to the poor: ‘come find the church’, but he says to those of us in the church: ‘go into the world and find the poor, hungry, homeless, imprisoned.’”

Luke 4:18 sums it up so well! Jesus says:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.”

Jesus came so that would have life & live to the full. He came to break the chains of poverty.

We are his hands and feet. If we walk past poverty unphased and never touched, then something is wrong. Our hearts have become hardened.

⇒ **Alleviating poverty starts in each of our hearts. It starts with a decision to say enough is enough, and love one person at a time**

In closing 2 Corinthians 6:10 is a beautiful verse

¹⁰sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

What is God saying to you today? What step can you take? Let's start by seeking him first.