

### **Ministry to the Poor and the Connection to Global Missions**

The title of this message is called “Ministry to the Poor and the Connection to Global Missions.” I could have also called it “Ministry to the Poor and the Connection to the Deeper Life.” I am not sure if you are aware but many godly men and women of the past, who have personally known and experienced revival, were at one point in their lives, involved in ministry to the poor. It would not surprise me if this is one of the common training grounds for all who have known an outpouring of the Spirit of God. A B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian & Missionary Alliance (of what we call the Alliance Canada today) was involved in ministry to the poor among the immigrants in New York City in the 1880s.

**(next slide)** Do you know where you can find the largest cross in the world? Supposedly it is in Madrid, Spain at the Valley of the Fallen. It is 150 metres high and can be seen from over 20 miles away. It was started in 1940, the year that my dad was born, and it took over 18 years to build. I want you to have the largest cross in the world in the back of your mind as we go through this message and I also want you to think about this question

**(next slide):** “How great is my salvation?”

In Matthew 25 we have the familiar passage where Jesus mentions the poor and associates Himself with the poor.

**(next slide) (don’t read) Matthew 25:31-46**

Don’t you find this passage very confusing? In it Jesus is speaking about His second coming. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended up to heaven 40 days later, He sat down at the right hand of the Father where He is right now. But there is a day coming in the future where He will come in His glory with all the holy angels and He will sit on the throne of His glory upon this earth and He will finally and ultimately rule over all the world. Jesus has absolute authority even now but, for our sake, because of His great mercy, He continues to give mankind time to repent. He continues to reveal to a lost and dying world His plan of salvation and He uses us in the Church to share this good news.

But one day soon He will return in His glory. And when Jesus comes He will separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep represent the children of God who are considered righteous and are clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. They will inherit eternal life. The goats represent those who are not His children. The goats are those who will not repent and believe the Gospel. They will be cast away into the lake of fire and everlasting punishment.

This aspect of the passage seems pretty straightforward. But why would Jesus involve the poor as the main criteria in determining who are the sheep (the children of God) and who are the goats (those damned to the lake of fire)? And why does Jesus personalize the poor in this method of separating the sheep and the goats?

**(next slide) Matthew 25:35-36** <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

And He goes on to say in verse 40:

**Matthew 25:40** <sup>40</sup> ..., 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

How does this make any sense? How could helping the poor associate us with Jesus? This almost makes it sound like that if you are poor then you are automatically a child of God. Or that if you are poor, then you will know Jesus. Is this true? Or this could be interpreted that Jesus reveals Himself in secret among the poor or in the poor. Is this what Jesus does? Does Jesus secretly leave His throne in heaven and appear on earth as a poor man? If you continually help the poor then eventually one of those men or women will be Jesus of whom you helped?

Or can we interpret this as meaning that if you help the poor then you are guaranteed to be a child of God?

And what does any of this have to do with Jesus separating the sheep and goats when He returns in His glory? How does this relate to the final judgment? Don't you see how confusing this passage is? This is what I want to examine in more detail with you today.

**(next slide)**

The Good News Chapel ministers to many people in Regina who would be considered among the least in our society. Many who attend our church have been wrongly abused as children and have been born into terrible situations of which they did not deserve. Many who attend our church are consumed by addictions that they have fallen into as a direct result of the wrongs that they have suffered and wrong choices they have made.

So it would be easy for me to pat myself on the back based upon this passage. I could talk to you about the sacrifices that my family and I have made in order to minister among the poor. I could share with you how wonderful it is to show love and compassion to those who are considered among the least in society. I could urge you to do the same. I could tell you about the terrible stories of death surrounding many who go to our church. I could appeal to your emotions. I could say, "If only there were more people helping and diverting their wealth to the poor we could end poverty! If only there were more social programs these situations could be reversed!" I could preach the social Gospel before you and urge you by saying, "If only you will give more to help the poor you will be eternally blessed."

**(next slide)** After all, even Judas Iscariot *claimed* to see the importance of giving to the poor. In John Chapter 12 we see that when Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with expensive ointment Judas Iscariot said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"

**(don't read) John 12:3-5**

**(next slide)** If even Judas Iscariot could recognize the importance of giving to the poor we really need to determine a Biblical reason for helping those in need. Why should we help the poor?

**(next slide)** But we can also ask the same question in relation to missions as often the question: “why should we support global missions?”

**(next slide)** overlaps with the question: “Why should we help the poor?”

**(next slide)** Much of mission work is going to unreached people groups, often to people who are living in poverty. Most mission trips are the people who would be considered the

**(next slide)** “haves” going to the

**(next slide)** “have nots”

**(next slide)** To get the proper perspective we must realize that there are now large secular organizations (many here will remember the WE charity scandal here in Canada) and celebrities who have large amounts of money that is being used to help elevate people out of poverty in different parts of the globe. There is a lot of good that is happening around the world in regards to helping those in need.

As even Judas Iscariot could recognize the importance of helping the poor, and secular organizations and celebrities see the importance of helping the poor both locally and overseas, we must recognize that we, as Christians, must have a *different* motivation and purpose. But have we really thought this through?

**(next slide)** I want you to think of the response of a group of people going on a short term mission trip with WE charity vs. a group of people going overseas with the Alliance Canada. Both groups go to a place where the people are in poverty. Both groups come home from their trips and feel a certain sense of disillusionment. The trips impact them deeply. But how do they process what they have experienced?

I know of a woman who went on a Christian mission trip and she was able to give a new pair of shoes to a young girl living in poverty. She then came home and felt guilty about her closet full of shoes. She felt guilty about her abundance and her lack of gratitude towards God for her belongings. While there was nothing wrong in this Christian woman recognizing her lack of gratitude towards God and perhaps that she had been living a life of excess, is this the Gospel message? Was her response really any different from someone who may have gone on a trip with WE charity?

**(next slide)** Then there are the toilets. Often this is one of the adjustments for someone in Canada going to a place of poverty. Here is a picture of a toilet getting repaired that I took in Bolivia when my wife and I went on a short term mission trip in 2007. The majority of the world still squats to go to the bathroom instead of using a toilet that you sit on like we do here in North America. We can tend to think that everyone should have toilets like we do here in Canada.

**(next slide)** And then there is the access to food. Here is a picture of one of our meals as part of the Sunday service at the Good News Chapel. Often when a person sees people in poverty who have so little, they feel guilty about their own access to food. One couple who came to help

out at our church refused to eat as part of the meal, not because we didn't have enough food, but because they were around people in poverty and it brought them a sense of shame to eat with them.

**(next slide)** These are some of the challenges that may be faced on a short term mission trip or by attending the Good News Chapel. But when we experience such challenges and situations are we really looking at the poor from the lens of the Gospel or are we simply looking at these people through the lens of our abundance? Are we in reality just struggling with cultural differences? Are we really responding any different than the person who went on a trip with WE charity?

I have heard of someone who was a professing Christian who went on a short term mission trip and came back and renounced the faith and became an atheist because they became disillusioned by the inequality in the world and couldn't come to terms with how God could allow this.

**(next slide)** So how do we come to terms with this? How do we look at the poor from the proper lens of the Gospel?

**(next slide)** I go back to the question again: "Why should we help the poor?"

**(next slide)** First off we need to recognize the words of Jesus where He said in John Chapter 12, "For the poor you always have with you."

**(don't read) John 12:3-5, 7-8**

No matter how hard we try, we will never be able to end poverty. This problem will only be solved at the second coming of Jesus Christ. It isn't wrong to try and help someone who is in poverty to have a more comfortable life especially as disease and death is more common. But we must remember that utopia is never the end goal of the Christian. The only way that this world can be made perfect is for Jesus Christ to return to this earth in judgment and for there to be new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It is never my goal as a pastor to see everyone in our church find freedom from poverty. For many this will never be achievable in their lifetime. Rather my goal is that they will repent and believe the Gospel and grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. The missionary going overseas never has the ultimate goal of lifting people out of poverty but rather sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and to see the salvation of sinners.

But there must be a greater benefit of ministering to the poor than just sharing the Gospel message. **(next slide)** There must be a reason why Jesus associated Himself with the poor in the passage from Matthew 25 that we read at the beginning. There must be a way that we can better come to terms with the disillusionment that we can feel after being exposed to extreme poverty.

**(next slide)** In Luke 7, Jesus was at the house of Simon the Pharisee and a woman who was a known sinner anointed Jesus' feet with deep emotion. She even washed Jesus' feet with her tears. Because the woman had been forgiven more, she loved more. Simon the Pharisee claimed to love God but he showed Jesus no love at all. He knew nothing of true forgiveness from God.

**(don't read) Luke 7:36-50** ... <sup>40</sup> And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." <sup>41</sup> "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. **Now which of them will love him more?"** <sup>43</sup> **Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt."** And he said to him, **"You have judged rightly."** <sup>44</sup>

... <sup>47</sup> **Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."** <sup>48</sup> And he said to her, **"Your sins are forgiven."** <sup>49</sup> ...

**(next slide)** In these different passages, Jesus is really answering the question, **"How great is my salvation?"** If you were able to look at your salvation in a physical way that could be measured and seen and it was the distance between you on earth to God in heaven how large of a cross would be required? How large would that cross have to be to span where you are on earth to where God is in heaven? Would the cross in Spain be large enough? Are my sins greater than your sins and so I would need a bigger cross while you would need a smaller one?

Or you could ask the question in another way? How easy is it to become a Christian? Well for many, and perhaps even for some among us here, it was very easy. You may say I just read my Bible or I listened to Pastor Randy's preaching and one day I repented of my sins and believed that Jesus Christ died on the cross for me.

But *after* you were born again how difficult did your life become? Was it pretty much as easy as it was before you became a Christian or did it get more difficult? Or did your life actually become easier? If you believe the prosperity Gospel then obviously your hope is that it will become easier.

Looking at the illustration again, was the initial cross large enough or do you actually need a bigger cross now for all that you have suffered as a Christian or for the struggles you have had in overcoming sin since you became a Christian?

While this illustration might help contextualize our salvation to some degree, the reality is that:

**(next slide) - there is an infinite gap between God and man**

All of us, no matter who we are, have an infinite gap separating us from God. All of us, no matter how wicked of a life we have lived, or how much we may have had to suffer are separated from God by an infinite span. It took the infinite love of God as seen in the God-man Jesus Christ to span the gap.

This gap is beyond human comprehension. The holiness of God is so great and the evil of sin is so unfathomable to Him that:

**(next slide) - none of us will ever fully comprehend how great our salvation is through Jesus Christ**

For all eternity we will grow in our understanding of the greatness of our salvation through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. For all eternity we will grow in our love to God.

**(next slide) The normal pattern of spiritual growth** in the Christian is supposed to be:

**(next slide) - God is magnified.** Our view of God should be ever increasing as we understand more and more of His greatness.

**(next slide) - I become less.** As my view of God increases, I grow in humility and my understanding of my position apart from God is recognized as greater than what it was before.

**(next slide) - Jesus Christ's salvation becomes greater to me.** His finished work upon the cross- the span from my place on earth to God in heaven is filled in a greater way by the cross of Jesus.

**(next slide) - the Holy Spirit's influence increases in my life.** His resurrection power is more evident in my life as a result of God being magnified, I becoming less, and salvation through Jesus Christ becoming greater to me. The Holy Spirit will make His presence known to me in a greater way if the three preceding points have occurred in my life.

While this is supposed to be the norm for all of us as Christian it can be difficult at times to grasp this in an ever increasing way. And herein lies the blessings and advantages of ministering among the poor and how we can come to terms with what we may experience on a short-term mission trip.

**(next slide) What can be learnt from the poor?**

**(next slide) - the poor are a type in Scripture through which we can see the salvation of God more clearly**

A type in the Bible is a picture that helps us understand doctrine more clearly. The Old Testament is filled with types that point to the great anti-type Jesus Christ but they also help us to understand the Gospel more clearly. In this manner the poor are a type in Scripture. They help us understand our own salvation more clearly.

While we may struggle to grasp the greatness of our own salvation in an ever increasing way, the blessing of ministering among the poor is that the power of Almighty God in the salvation of a single soul is absolutely visible and evident in the life of a person who has been in poverty.

This can help us to see the salvation of God in the proper way. Through ministering to the poor we see our salvation as it really is. It becomes like the woman who was forgiven much or the person who was forgiven the larger debt. Through the eyes of the poor the greatness of their salvation is usually quite visible and noticeable while in our own lives it may be more hidden or unnoticed or unappreciated.

In ministering to the poor we never come with an attitude that we are better than the person in poverty. Rather we look at them as though we are looking in a mirror. When we share the Good News of Jesus Christ and help and encourage and disciple, we are also looking back at ourselves. Through their struggles, we can understand and view our own salvation in the manner that God intends.

**(next slide)** It is in this manner that Jesus associates Himself with the poor in Matthew 25. We will see the salvation of Jesus Christ at work in ourselves more clearly as we help the person in need with the right attitude. We will see Jesus in them as we will see the great anti-type- not that we see Jesus directly- but we are brought to understand His cross in a greater way. All types in Scripture ultimately point to the cross of Jesus Christ and some aspect of our salvation from beginning to end.

**(next slide) What are some ways in which the poor are a type in Scripture?**

**(next slide) - through the struggles they face**

One hundred and forty years ago when my ancestors came to this land, it was very difficult. My great grandmother arrived here in the 1880s with her family. They came right after the railroad had been completed and settled by Wolseley. The second year they were here it was very dry and they were able to harvest very little from their crops. As the government gave 3 cents per tail for a gopher, the kids made \$15.00 and this paid for their clothes. The Indigenous people brought them duck and their dad cut wood and caught rabbits. The second winter was very cold and they only had the cooking stove to keep them warm. Winter boots were old rags sewed to the soles of their stockings. It was so difficult that they had to go back to Ontario for a few years before coming back again to the prairies.

But now life is relatively easy for so many in Canada. Most people aren't struggling to physically survive and most people do not see death around them continually. It used to be a very common thing for a child or mother to die in childbirth but now it is uncommon. Apart from things like cancer and car accidents it seems like death is not so common anymore. Life has become easier. So, in turn, it is harder for us to recognize the greatness of our salvation just from the difficulties of everyday life.

But among the poor, in any society, the intense struggle for survival and the brevity of life is never removed. Death is more common among all of the poor in any land. And if you are poor, and you become born again by the Spirit of God, it does not necessarily mean that your life is going to get any easier. You are not going to necessarily ever get out of a lifestyle of poverty just because you became a Christian.

**(next slide) - the effects of sin are more visible among the poor**

For the person who is in poverty as a result of their own sin, this proverb is absolutely true:

**Proverbs 13:15 (KJV)** the way of transgressors *is* hard.

**Proverbs 13:15 (ESV)** the way of the treacherous is their ruin.

If you want to understand that the wages of sin is death you will see it every day among the poor who are caught up in addictions. You can physically see them killing themselves as week after week their bodies deteriorate. They lose their teeth, they can no longer walk or control their bowels. They can no longer breathe. Their friends around them are continually dying. Their friends will stab them in the back to fuel their own addictions and they will steal from their own family. It's absolutely terrible.

But the same is true for any unbeliever. Apart from Jesus Christ, you are progressing week after week and getting closer and closer to eternal damnation where you will be separated from God forever. It's hard at times to see how blind an addict can be to the damage they are doing to themselves and those around them but the same is true for *any* unbeliever! All unbelievers justify their sin and continue on as if there is no eternal consequence to their actions. And the crazy thing is that many who are affluent will help the poor only to compare themselves to that low person. They exalt themselves and are thankful that they are not like that addict but they are blind to see that they are exactly the same in the sight of God.

In contrast, for those in poverty who enter into the Kingdom of God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, we see that:

**(next slide) - the effects of grace are more visible among the poor**

Usually there is a dramatic physical change as a person who was in poverty and addiction is born again. Jason, who helps lead prayer at our church, has an amazing testimony that was recently on Tribal Trails. In his addiction, he used to walk around with a shopping cart in absolute shame. He could barely walk. He never expected to be able to work a job in his life. Now he has two custodian jobs and has been off social assistance for years. You can physically see the transforming power of God in his life. His physical presence reflects the glory of God continually.

**(next slide) - the true spiritual condition is more recognizable among the poor**

We also find, at the Good News Chapel, that people don't just come to Bible studies or prayer under obligation. They generally are not doing things in the church because they are trying to impress someone or because of human persuasion. They generally only get involved as they are motivated by the Spirit of God to do so.

The same applies to backsliders. When someone falls back into their addiction it is quite obvious. You can smell it on their breath or see it in their eyes or hear it in their speech. But how many people in churches are backslidden and yet they are still sitting in the pews? They are deceiving themselves and those around them of their actual spiritual condition. They think that they can get away with it but God knows the true condition of their heart.

Also,

**(next slide) - the reality of the intense spiritual battle is more obvious among the poor**

For the people we are blessed to minister to, their battles are intense. The strongholds of addiction run deep and are so powerful. The death of loved family members is constant and depressing. The continual condemnation felt from past experiences and from society can be crippling and a situation could arise unexpectedly to cause them to once again believe lies about themselves and want to turn away from God. The consequences of turning back to past sins are often great and could lead to court cases or losing your kids or even death. But the reality is that we are *all* in an intense spiritual battle against the devil and without the infinite



power of God actively at work in our lives there is no hope for any of us to overcome and to be saved.

**(next slide) What connection is there between ministering to the poor here in Canada and global missions?**

**(next slide) - most missionaries overseas are ministering to people in poverty**

As I have already mentioned, most unreached people groups, at this point in human history, are not in places where people are living in abundance and wealth.

**(next slide) - you don't have to go that far to find the poor**

The poor are right here. You may have to go to North Central or the core area in Regina to find more people living in poverty but the reality is the poor are right here around us. And the sad reality is that there are those among the Indigenous people on reserves that live in similar conditions to those in third world countries. These reserves are very close. So you don't have to go very far to find the poor around you. This also means that you can get to know them personally as you try to connect with them again and again. A short term mission trip overseas can have a long term impact but it can be difficult to keep long lasting personal relationships and it can be very expensive.

**(next slide) - ministering to the poor can produce a heart for missions**

If you are truly ministering among the poor for the right reasons you will see your salvation in a greater way as you identify with the poor you are ministering with and you will grow in your desire to see the Kingdom of God advance worldwide. We've seen many people who have been involved in the ministry of the Good News Chapel who are now missionaries overseas and elsewhere in Canada.

**(next slide) - by ministering to the poor in the proper way the power and presence of God will be more real in your own life**

If you are willing to go to the hard places here in Canada, right in your back door, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, God will empower you to do so. The missionary overseas lives in absolute dependence upon God (hence the need for the deeper life). But if you are willing to go to the hard places here among the poor, you will also see His power and His presence in a greater way. And you will be able to pray and support your brothers and sisters in Christ overseas more effectively as you can relate to their struggles. There will be an urgency in your prayers and in sharing the Gospel. Complacency will not be as much of a temptation.

Which leads to my last point:

**(next slide) - by ministering to the poor your spiritual priorities will be more balanced and focused**

The Apostle Paul wrote:

**1 Corinthians 2:2** <sup>2</sup> For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The devil is always trying to get our focus off of Jesus Christ. He always is trying to get us to be unbalanced in some way in our understanding of the Scriptures and the Gospel. By ministering to the poor we will be able to see which priorities in the Church and in our own lives are the most important and which ones are secondary.

**(next slide)** So do you see more clearly now why Jesus uses the poor as His illustration in determining who is among the sheep and who is among the goats in the final judgment as described in Matthew 25? Can you understand why Jesus said the poor you will always have with you? Can you begin to see your salvation in a greater way?

**Matthew 25:35-36** <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

As we carry the burdens of the least in our society we identify with them and we see the world through their eyes. We are blessed and can see the salvation of God more clearly.

**(next slide)** **If we cannot see the greatness of our salvation, it is in reality no salvation at all.** Can you see the wisdom of God in His plan of salvation? Can you see the wisdom of God in your own salvation?

Do you now understand why Peter wrote:

**(next slide)** **1 Peter 4:18** "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

Great is the God of our salvation and worthy of all our praise!