

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/23/11 Wednesday Evening¹
"The Poor in Proverbs"--part 1

A couple of weeks ago in my Bible reading, I was in Proverbs and something struck me. The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about a subject that we're confronted with often, yet often respond to emotionally or by trying to ignore it. The subject is *the poor*.

Recently a man came by the church, claiming to possess supernatural power. He asked me to walk outside, where he showed me a "gift." Sitting on the mailbox was a rock which he said was a special rock from God which had special power and which he wanted me to have. I asked what he wanted. His reply--"I want to work to get some money. I could be wealthy if I wanted, but like John the Baptist I've renounced wealth so I could write a book God wants me to write. Before long you'll be reading my book, and I'll be famous."

The truth is, there are poor people all around us. Many poor people actually come to us for help with food, rent payments, gas, and other needs.

How does God want us to respond to the poor? We're supposed to be people who meet needs, true, but whose needs? Everyone who asks for help? What if the person asking for help doesn't really need help, or is asking for the wrong kind of help?

It's easy to become desensitized to the needs of the poor in an area like ours.

Discuss: Why is that so?

Key: The fact of the matter is this. The Bible has a lot to say about the poor. The word "poor" occurs 205 times in the Bible (KJV). It's interesting that in Proverbs alone, the word appears 35 times.

Our Goal: We want to spend a couple of weeks investigating what Proverbs has to say to us about ministering to the poor.

Proverbs is a practical, "how to" kind of book. God gave Proverbs to the Israelites to show in black and white terms how the Torah would look in daily life. Proverbs is all about *wisdom*. It shows us how to live a *wise life*, one that honors God.

What do we learn about the poor from Proverbs? Proverbs addresses at least five issues pertaining to the poor. We'll examine the first couple tonight and the rest next time.

1. Proverbs addresses how a person may become *poor*.

(Prov 10:4) He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

Q: According to this verse, what is one way a person may become poor? The NIV says, "Lazy hands make a man poor."

What does it mean to be "lazy?"

¹ This message comes from teaching done at WBC initially on 8/25/99.

Can a person be lazy, yet rich? The Proverbs are not airtight guarantees. They give us general principles--the way it *usually* is in life. Usually, if a person is lazy, he's going to squander away his assets and end up poor (remember the prodigal son?).

What counsel did Paul give Christians who stopped working in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10? If you don't work, don't expect others to feed you.

(Prov 21:17) He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

Q: How does the love of pleasure tend to make a person poor?

Q: What particular pleasures are mentioned here? "Wine and oil" (see NIV footnote: "Both were associated with lavish feasting. Oil was used in various lotions or perfumes, some of which were very expensive.")

(Prov 22:2) The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all.

Q: What do the rich and poor have in common? The Lord is their Maker. In a sense, whatever our lot may be in life is in God's control. The following verse shows that the rich and the poor have more in common than may first meet the eye...

(Prov 29:13) The poor and the deceitful man meet together: the LORD lighteneth both their eyes.

Q: What does the Lord give to both the poor person and his oppressor? Eyesight
Being rich doesn't mean a person is sinful, nor does being poor.

2. Proverbs addresses the difficult plight of the poor.

(Prov 10:15) The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty.

Q: What does wealth afford a rich person? In a word--power. It is his "fortified city." In our society it's said, "Money talks," and what does it say? "You'd better listen to me. I've got power." (e.g. Think of how we view that plastic card in our billfolds we call a "credit card." It's a symbol of power. Slap that card on the counter, and people jump!)

Q: But what can the poor point to, according to the verse? Only their "poverty." Poverty has no influence, no security, no friends (*NIVsb*).

(Prov 13:7) There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.

Q: Answer this. If a poor man acts like he's rich, is he? No. He may have a credit card with a \$5,000 limit, and he may talk big, and even spend big--for awhile. Yet in the end, he still has nothing.

(Prov 13:23) Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.

Q: A poor person may work hard, yet remain poor because of what reason? Injustice. Someone more powerful than he is may take away his income.

Application: Can you think of any examples?

(Prov 14:20) The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends.

Q: How are the poor viewed by their neighbors? "I don't want *those kind of people* moving in next to me! If that happens, you know what will happen to my property value!"

Q: What do the rich have, according to the text? Many friends. But are they really friends? As long as the money remains. Even if the rich fellow doesn't give me any of his money, his presence in my neighborhood helps me. How? Property value. So he's welcome.

Another text elaborates...

(Prov 19:4) Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.

But it gets even worse for the poor. Besides neighbors, who else tends to look down on a poor person? See...

(Prov 19:7) All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.

As a pastor I've seen this. One of the first questions I typically ask a poor person who's asking for help is, "Have you asked your relatives for help?" Usually the answer is, "They can't help me." I wonder sometimes if it's not, they *won't* help me.

And maybe for legitimate reasons. Maybe they've taken advantage of their family. But nonetheless, we tend to overlook the faults of a wealthy person a little more readily than we do a poor person.

(Prov 22:7) The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

Q: What's true of a poor person according to this verse? He's a servant to the person who loans him money.

Another interesting verse is the next one. Agur asks God to give him neither poverty nor riches (Prov 30:8). Why? See...

(Prov 30:9a, NIV) Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, Who is the LORD?" Or...

(Prov 30:9) Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

Q: What is a poor person tempted to do to take the pressure off? Steal

What do some people want to do according to the following verse?

(Prov 30:14) There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

3. Proverbs addresses how to treat the *poor*.

(Prov 14:21 KJV) He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.

The NIV says, "Blessed is he who is kind to the needy." The same phrase appears in Prov 14:31 KJV, "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor."

What's true of a person who is kind to the poor?...

(Prov 19:17 KJV) He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

We're actually lending to the Lord when we show kindness to the poor.

What's true if we ignore the poor?

(Prov 21:13 KJV) Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.

It's a serious matter to bury our head in the sand and ignore needs.

What are some ways a person can show kindness to the needy? The following Proverbs will give some practical examples...

For Next Time: Part Two...

(Prov 22:9 KJV) He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.

(Prov 28:27 KJV) He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.

(Prov 29:7 KJV) The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.

(Prov 29:14 KJV) The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever.

(Prov 31:9 KJV) Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

(Prov 31:20 KJV) She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

4. Proverbs confronts those who take advantage of the *poor*.

(Prov 17:5 KJV) Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.

(Prov 18:23 KJV) The poor useth entreaties; but the rich answereth roughly.

(Prov 22:16 KJV) He that oppreseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.

(Prov 22:22 KJV) Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate:

(Prov 28:3 KJV) A poor man that oppreseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food.

(Prov 28:8 KJV) He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.

(Prov 28:15 KJV) As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people.

5. Proverbs shows that there are worse things than being *poor*.

(Prov 13:8) The ransom of a man's life are his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke.

The NIV puts it, "A man's riches may ransom his life, but a poor man hears no threat." When was the last time you heard of a street person being held for ransom?

(Prov 19:1 KJV) Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.

(Prov 19:22 KJV) The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar.

(Prov 28:6 KJV) Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.

(Prov 28:11 KJV) The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.