

The Right Hand of the Poor

by Carter Conlon

Carter Conlon's sermon calls the church to embrace and serve the marginalized, reflecting the heart of God through compassion and humility.

Duration: 59:47

Topics: "Poverty"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher warns against the dangers of religion losing the heart of God. He observes that in the feast being held in the name of God, people are jockeying for position and seeking self-promotion. The preacher emphasizes that when religion loses the heart of God, it becomes a fellowship based on personal gain or comfort, rather than genuine love and humility. He then quotes from Luke 14:12-14, where Jesus instructs believers to invite the poor, maimed, lame, and blind to their feasts, as they cannot repay them, and they will be rewarded in the resurrection of the just. The preacher concludes by stating that this message is specifically for the Times Square Church, but it may have a practical application for others as well.

Transcript

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You are welcome to make additional cassettes of this message for free distribution to friends. However, for all other forms of reproduction or electronic transmission, existing copyright laws apply. I have something on my heart this morning that's been there all week.

I cannot shake it, and I feel it's a word just for this church body. Now, when I say this church body, I mean those that have made Times Square Church your home church. Now, this doesn't mean that it doesn't have a practical application for everybody else who's here today or may hear it in the future, but I do feel that this is a specific word for this church.

Now, today, I'm going to speak to you as your senior pastor, and this is a word for this flock. It doesn't necessarily have it to go far beyond here. This is something that God has put very deeply on my heart for you.

If you'll go to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 14, and while you're turning there, let's pray together. Now, Father, I thank you for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, without your presence, we are nothing.

We have nothing. I thank you for the quickening power. I thank you, God, for what you will do in my mind and physical body today, Lord, that you will take these few thoughts that I have, and you'll multiply them, and you will feed this body.

I ask you to feed this church soundly. Let this be something that gets deep in our spirit. Every one of us, O God, and may this be a course correction for many of our lives that will cause us to move in a direction that we are often fearful to go into.

But, Lord, you will give us the power to do this. You will help us. O Jesus, I ask that you put weight on this word today.

Let it not be a word that can be easily put aside. Let it not be able to be dropped to the ground on the way out of these doors. O God, help us now.

Holy Spirit, help us to hear this. For I know in my heart you are speaking to this church. Give me great grace and give us grace as a church to hear this.

And I thank you for it in Jesus' mighty name. Luke chapter 14, verse 12. Now, this is Jesus speaking.

It says, Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbors, lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee, for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. Now, before we go to this particular passage of Scripture, if we go back to the beginning of chapter 14, this passage of Scripture, as a matter of fact the entire chapter, actually shows us what all religion will become when it loses the heart of God.

We are in danger as much as any generation before us is in danger. Church movements in the past have known great, great victories. They've had an incredible presence of the Lord in their midst, and God has done wondrous things in the people and through them.

But then suddenly, because they're not on their guard, something begins to creep in. It's a religiousness. It's common to all of humanity.

You'll find it in churches all over the land today. You'll find it in places, no matter what name's on the door, you'll find it all over the world. And here in this chapter, when we go to the beginning of it, we see that Jesus was invited, in verse 1, to the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day.

So now this is the day of worship. Here is God, in a sense. They don't know He's God, but He's God, and He's been invited to a house to have a meal that is being celebrated in His honor.

It's a type, in a sense, of every time we gather to worship Him in His house. And a certain man came in, which had the dropsy, which was a disease. And Jesus answered, spake to the lawyers and saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? And they held their peace.

And He took him and healed him and let him go. And here's the issue. Religion that loses the heart of God will become all rules without compassion.

Rules and regulations. This man is in the midst of the feast. He is sick.

He's in a terrible need. But you see, it's their rule that we don't do things this certain way. It's the rule that if you're going to heal, we'll do it on another day.

Don't do it on this day. And churches can get like that, where we begin to meet. And it's all around the fellowship of the body.

It's around the honoring of God as we see it. And then somebody comes in the midst and, in a sense, breaks the rules. Maybe they're not dressed the way the church people normally dress.

Or maybe they don't smell the way church people should smell. Maybe they don't talk the way church. Maybe they're foreign to the whole counterculture, in a sense, which is what a church does become.

We develop our own language. We develop, in a sense, our own codes of ethics, of course, based on the Scriptures. We develop ways of interacting.

And, of course, somebody that comes in from the outside hasn't got a clue what is going on. I remember I was that way before I came to the Lord. Jeans, jean jacket, backpack coming into a church.

First time I'd ever been in a Bible-preaching, teaching church. I was interested. The people seemed very sincere.

But I had never a clue what was going on. They spoke another language. I had no idea.

Righteousness, I'd never heard of it in my whole life. The pastor kept referring to those who were under the law and pointing to me in the balcony. And I was a police officer, so I thought I must have picked the right side of the church.

I had no idea what he's talking about. Everybody is dressed really nice. They've all got nice suits on, nice ties.

They all carry these huge books, which I assumed then were a Bible. And I had no idea. I'm totally outside of this counterculture as it is.

Everything in me is screaming for truth. And there could have been a moment, had I understood the preacher, that I possibly would have even stood to my feet and said, Hey, would you consider me? I've got deep needs in my heart. My life is in trouble.

My marriage is in difficulty. And I don't know how to be a father. And I'm dealing with anger in my life and all of these things.

And maybe I just would have stood and shouted out. It does happen once in a while. I was preaching in a service one time.

And at the end of the service, we were just singing some wonderful songs, just songs of worship to the Lord. And this woman just stood up and she said, Can somebody help me? I'm lost in my sin. God.

She said, Anybody, can you help me? And it's almost like a shockwave went through this little church. This is out of order. What do we do? People don't normally stand up when we're closing with our nice little sweet song and shout out to be saved.

But it turned out to be a wonderful turning point for that particular time of fellowship. Rules without compassion. We have to be careful of these things.

When people come through the door of the church and they've got earrings on as big as basketball hoops, and they were going to have young people come into this church. I heard there's a somebody here in New York City now that's got actual spikes screwed into his head. He's got three of them.

They screw in an operation and they put devices in his skull and he screws these spikes. And he goes down to the Roseland here next door all the time. What happens if one day he decides to come in and sit in the front row of the church? What happens when God begins to bring those who have need into our midst? You see, what happens is there's a joy comes into our heart.

What happens is the compassion of Christ begins to flow out of us unless we become religious. Unless rules are taking precedence over the compassion of God. We need to be very, very careful that that doesn't ever come into our midst.

And then again, verse 7, Jesus is continuous. This is all one feast, this whole chapter 14. And he speaks a parable to those that were bidden when he marked how they chose out the chief room.

So he saw them coming into this feast that is taking place as it is in the name of God. And he watches this as it's happening and he's watching people come in and they are jockeying for position as it is. Everybody is looking for the best seats and perhaps they're getting somewhat annoyed if somebody else is sitting in the seat that they have come to think is theirs.

And he's talking about the admiring of persons. Religion without the heart of God becomes an admiring of persons. It becomes a place of self-promotion where people begin to push with the shoulder as it is and look for a better place and a pushing forward for reputation.

That's exactly what was happening. Here's a feast in the name of God, but they're pushing forward to be seen. There's such a lack or loss of humility now in the body.

And that's always, always what happens when religion loses the heart of God. And now verse 12 where we started to verse 14. He said, when you make a dinner, don't call your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or your rich neighbors, lest they also bid you return.

In other words, they give you a return invitation and you are repaid for what you've done. But when you make a feast, call the poor, the lame, the lame and the blind. Now, you see, religion that loses the heart of God becomes a fellowship with only those from whom we hope to gain some form of advantage.

Or it becomes fellowship that is based around those that we are most comfortable with. Those of our own race, those of our own social class, those of our own cultural standing or educational background. And there's always a tendency to form into groups.

And that's what Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 spoke so strongly about. They were coming together and they were forming little groups. And those who didn't fit the criteria were being pushed to the sides of the church.

And you see, the Holy Spirit saw this and it so grieved the Spirit of God that he burdened the Apostle Paul to come at a time when, you know, the desire of God was to correct this situation in the church. Now, in

verse 13, Jesus says, now if you're going to have a banquet and if it's going to be in my name, because you see, this is what this whole banquet was about, this entire chapter. He said, if it's going to be in my name, he said, here's your guest list.

He said, I want you to bring in the poor and those that have something wrong with them, they're maimed, there's something physically wrong perhaps, or they're lacking in some physical manner. And the lame, those that have no power whatsoever to get up and even walk on their own, I want you to invite them. And the blind, those who can't really see even what's going on in the midst of your feast, they walk around bumping and stumbling into everybody, pushing all the wrong buttons and saying all the wrong things.

And he says, I want you to invite them. He said, and you're going to be repaid, not necessarily by them on this earth, but he says, God Almighty is going to take account of what's going on in the midst of you. And there is a day of the resurrection of the just, and you're going to be repaid for the kindness that you've shown for the poor and the lame and the maimed and the blind that are all among you.

Now, Matthew chapter 11, put a marker in Luke chapter 15. And in Matthew chapter 11, John the Baptist, of course, had been the forerunner of the coming of the Messiah. John had made some wonderful proclamations about Jesus Christ, to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

He told his own disciples, as it is, here he is, follow him. And he said, I must, he must increase and I must decrease. But then later on in his life, because of circumstance, he began to be perhaps somewhat confused.

And he sent some disciples to Jesus. And they said to, he told them to ask Jesus, are you the one that should come? Or he says, do we look for another one? Is there somebody else that, verse, chapter 11, verse 3, it says, are thou he that should come or do we look for another? Are you really the Messiah? Now, Jesus does not answer John with some great big display of power, saying to his disciples here, watch this, I'm going to prove to you I am the Messiah. I'm going to prove to you I'm the Son of God.

Now, just watch the sun, watch it carefully now, and I'm just going to move it ahead five degrees. See those clouds that have just passed by, I'm going to bring them back. Now, he could have easily done anything like that.

You see that grave over there? I'm just going to call that man out of the dead and just prove conclusively that I am the Son of God. And he says, you take this back to John. No, that's not what he did.

He said, now go and show John those things which you see, you do hear and see. He says, now, there are miraculous things happening among you. And he says, I want you to go and tell this to John.

And these are the evidences that I am the Messiah. I am the Son of God. And he goes on, verse 5, and he says, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

He says, tell John that this is my congregation. The blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the dead, and the poor. This is my congregation.

He says, go and tell John and tell him, say, blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me. Now, the word offended in the Greek is skandalizo from where we get the word scandalized in the English language. And it means to be led or to be thrown into ruin.

In other words, Jesus is saying, you are blessed if you trust that by following me and doing what I do, you will not be led or thrown into ruin. Go and tell John. John knows the Scriptures.

John has studied the Old Testament. John understands something about the heart of God. And go and tell him the things that he is seeing, that you are seeing around, that my congregation that I have gathered, you are seeing the heart of God.

And he said, tell John. John, you will be blessed if you will believe that to follow this pathway, you will not be thrown into ruin. You're not being misled if you follow in these footsteps.

It's amazing when you begin to see it. Now, go to Matthew chapter 19 with me, if you will. Matthew 19 is a classic example of this.

A young man who thought by obeying God he was going to be thrown into some form of ruin. 19, verse 16, And behold, one came and said unto him, Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why do you call me good? There's none good but one, and that is God. But if you will enter into life, keep the commandments.

He said unto him, Which? And Jesus said, You shall not do murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. So here is a young man whose relationship with God is rules. It's an obedience to the rules.

And because of this, he feels like he has a sense of righteousness. But coming into the presence of the living God, he has a deep feeling that something is missing. You ever felt that way? You ever felt like, I seem to be doing it right.

As far as I know, I'm obeying all the rules. I'm not murdering. I'm not committing adultery.

I'm keeping the commandments. I haven't stolen anything. I'm being careful what I speak about people.

I'm honoring my father and mother. I'm not bearing false witness. I'm loving my neighbor.

But why do I feel this emptiness inside? Why do I feel this when I come into God's presence? How come? And I believe, if you're honest this morning, there are godly people here that you are, in effect, obeying the rules. At least most of them, most of the time. But you come into the presence of the Lord, and the Holy Ghost just comes, and there's such a moving of God.

And there's this feeling inside. What do I lack? I seem to be always within a foot of the carrot, as it is. There's something I'm sensing that God wants to do in my life, and it's constantly just out of my grasp.

Why do I feel this? And this young man, that's exactly the way he felt. There's no other reason that he would even ask this question, but that he was in the presence of God. And in the presence of God, he became aware of something in his own heart.

He didn't know what it was, but he knew that he was lacking something. I have missed the mark, as it is. I'm falling short of the glory of God.

And so, the young man said to him, he said in verse 20, I've kept all these things from my youth up. Like, I mean, I've been a church-going kid. I've been taught this.

I've been schooled in the Bible as they had it in their generation. And I have obeyed to the best of my ability. But what do I lack? What do I lack? Here I am, Jesus, talking to you, and I have this sense that I'm not complete.

And Jesus said to him in verse 21, he said, If thou wilt be perfect... Now, I want to stop right there, because it's important to understand the word that he's speaking. He's not talking about sinless perfection. He's not talking about the type of perfection as it is that can only come through the blood of Jesus Christ.

The perfection he's talking about is this yearning in his heart to have that dimension of God that he seems to be lacking in his own personal walk. This is the perfection that Jesus is talking about. Because we know, of course, that we're not saved through our works.

We're saved through faith in Christ. The word perfect here means brought to maturity. Or reaching the goal that God himself has set for your life.

And so this is what Jesus is saying to him. If you will reach the goal that I have set for your life. Now, that's amazing.

I want you to stop right there, because the scripture tells us that every one of us were created for a purpose that was ordained for us by God. Peter says, before the world even began, we were given grace in Christ for the purpose that God has ordained for our lives. You weren't just haphazardly born.

And you didn't just by accident find out about God. God allowed you to be born. And by his goodness he revealed himself to you.

If he doesn't reveal himself, you and I would never have seen him. We were poor, wretched, miserable, naked and blind. We were lame and dumb.

And yet God came to us in our ignorant condition. And in his goodness he poured out a revelation of himself into our poverty. Our eyes were opened and we began to understand who Christ is, who we are without God, and yet who we could be because of the sacrifice he paid for us on Calvary.

Now, we're brought into a purpose. God says, I ordained you. Even Jeremiah, remember, he says, I ordained you to be a prophet before you were even conceived in your mother's womb.

I ordained you. You were not ordained by man, you were ordained by God. And you see, God ordained you for a purpose.

He ordained me for a purpose from before I was born. I think that should be an exciting thing to understand that. That God has a plan for my life, and nobody else can do what God has called me to do.

I am unique, I'm an individual. I am a piece of the puzzle of God's love and creation as it is, and I'm the only one that fits into that slot that God has designed for my life. And this young man says, I'm in your presence, and I'm obeying you to the best of my ability, but I sense there's something more you want to do through me.

And Jesus says, if you will come to the place that I've ordained for you, if you want to be the person that I've destined you to be, if you want to find the goal that I have set for your life from before the foundation of the world, then he gives him a specific instruction. He says, go and sell what you have. Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me.

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Now, when he tells this young man, he says, sell what you have, he knows this young man has another trust. He has another God, as it is at the very center of his heart.

He has something he's holding to more than Christ who stands before him, more than the will of God for his life. You see, the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10, verse 24, Jesus said to the disciples, how hard it is for those who trust in riches. And so he identifies this young man's problem as a wrong trust.

He is looking to something other than the promises of God, other than the plan of God, the provision of God. He's looking to something else that he has accumulated or has inherited over the years, and it's become his trust. It's become his security.

And Jesus goes right to the core of it, because he knows that until this thing in him is broken, he can never be that which God has destined him to be. He goes right to the heart of the issue. And he says, go and sell off, as it is the trust that's in your heart.

Go and sell it off. Get rid of it, because it's hindering you from following me. And then he says, give to the poor.

Now, the interesting thing is, and quite often the scripture has been misinterpreted in this regard, he doesn't say give it all to the poor, and you won't find that in any translation. He just says, sell off what you have, and the implication is, open your hand and start giving to the poor. He's not saying sell it all.

I mean, he can do that. He's not saying sell it all and give it all, because the word all is not there, and God did not insert it for a very specific reason. He says, sell it and start giving to the poor.

Start releasing what I've given into your life. And then he says, you'll have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me. Amazing.

He says, just open your hand and start giving. You see, we have to interpret scripture by scripture. And you remember that in Luke chapter 19, verses 8 and 9, there was a man called Zacchaeus, a tax gatherer, who invited Jesus to his house.

And as Jesus sat at dinner with Zacchaeus and his household and began to proclaim the kingdom of God, Zacchaeus was touched deeply by what he was hearing. And Zacchaeus stands to his feet, and I can see this man standing up, and he says, I give today, I make a proclamation, I give half of everything I have to the poor. Just half.

And he says, if I've taken anything by false accusation, I'm going to restore it fourfold. In other words, if I've defrauded somebody of \$10, I'm going to give him \$40. And Jesus looks at this man, and he says, this day is salvation come to this house, as he also is a son of Abraham.

This day. You see, this man just said, I'm going to give half. I've been called to do both in my lifetime.

One time in my younger years, the Lord knew that I had a slush fund in the bank, and I was leaning on it. And he had a plan for my life. I had left my job as a police officer.

I had rolled over enough money to pay for my house. I had a little bit left, and I put it in the bank. And this was my, I call it lovingly today, my Ananias and Sapphira slush fund.

In my heart, it was, if this whole preaching thing doesn't work out, at least I've got something to start with. All over again. And the Lord started to go after it, and I started to resist God.

Hey, come on now. I've given you everything. I give you my job.

My dental plan is gone. My pension is gone. My medical insurance, all of that.

Now, come on. This little slush fund is all I have. And I would start pushing away the voice of God.

Then I remember the day that a friend came to me, and a friend who was in ministry and didn't have much of an income. And he said to me, I don't know what to do. He says, my car just blew up.

The engine is gone. My car is finished. He says, I can't even get to the place where I minister.

And he's sitting in my office, and he's so concerned. And I said, well, let's pray about that. You know, we get very, very spiritual.

And the Lord said to me clearly, there's nothing to pray about. Everything he needs is in your bank account. And so I, but I persisted in prayer.

Oh, we get so religious when we don't want to give, don't we? And I persisted in prayer. And I remember bowing my head and saying, oh, God. You own the cattle on a thousand hills.

And I could hear this voice behind me saying, you utter hypocrite. Here you are praying for this man's need, and you're resisting what I, it's, he's a brother in the Lord, and I've given you the means to meet the need. And I remember my prayer.

It just felt like I had just drank water out of a mud puddle coming out of my mouth. It had no life in it. And finally, he so thanked me for my prayer and got up and left.

And I felt like such a hypocrite. And then finally the Lord got a hold of me and said, take it all and give it to him. Buy him a car.

And beloved, I'm going to tell you something. I did obey God. It's not like it was an easy thing to do.

Then later on, many years later, he asked me to do the same again, but this time half. But the half was much bigger than the whole had been years before. Sell what you have, he said to the rich young ruler, and start opening your hand.

And he, the scripture says he went away sorrowful, offended, thinking somehow that walking with Christ and like Christ would bring him to ruin. And aren't we all like that? I remember going to the bank and thinking somehow that obeying God was going to bring me to ruin. What about my kid's teeth? What about their education? What if my car breaks down? I mean, Lord, I don't have a very good car myself.

What if my car breaks down? And all of these questions going to, and God's just saying, just obey me. Just obey me. You're not going to be put to shame if you obey me.

It's so hard sometimes just to take those first steps and obey God. And, you know, this was a legitimate need. You know, as I'm preaching this, I know exactly what's going to happen to some, because in every church you have a small percentage of what I term church leeches that just travel from church to church.

They hear a message like this, and they'll be running right to you. And in five seconds or less, all their needs are going to be coming out of their mouth. There's a few beggars that attend this church.

They'll be sitting on the sidewalk after this message. And they'll be re-quoting the words into your ears. You know what I'm talking about as you pass by.

You're not under any obligation to put anything in any of those buckets. We've offered every one of them opportunities to go into programs, but they've chosen to live on the street. That's where they want to be.

You have to have discernment. You have to know which is a genuine need in the body and which is just somebody taking advantage of your generosity. He walked away sorrowful, as if walking with Christ and having an open hand is going to bring him to ruin.

Beloved, I would be a liar if I stood here today and said, there's times that God has asked me to give largely, that it hasn't been a battle in my life. But I can tell you truthfully, every time I have obeyed God, He has, in a much larger way, given back to me. Whether it's finances or whether it's just something He does in my family, something He does in my own heart, because you begin to realize that God, you're not leading me to ruin, you're leading me to the depth of yourself.

You're leading me to something that's in your heart that cannot be found unless I make the choice to walk with you in obedience. You see, here's a man, he's got religion, and with all his adherence to the rules, he's missing the very heart of God. And beloved, you know if that's beginning to happen to you because you are more and more aware that there's something lacking and more and more untouched with the needs of those who have genuine need in the body that's all around you.

He's missing the heart of God. Think of the psalmist David, who the Bible says was a man after God's own heart. In Psalm 25, verse 4, he says, Lord, that you've been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in distress.

Psalm 10, 14, he says, The poor commits himself unto thee, and you are a helper of the fatherless. Psalm 12, verse 5, he says, For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord, and I will set him in safety from him that puffs at him or would ensnare him. Psalm 109, verse 31, David speaking about the Lord God Almighty himself, he says, For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor to save him from those that condemn his soul.

Oh, beloved, think about it now, how this must be the testimony of the heart of the true New Testament church. Those of us who have the Spirit of God upon us in our generation, this should be our heart. This is the heart of God.

How can we say we love God? The Scripture says in one of the epistles of John, he says if we see a brother have need and we close our bowels of compassion, how can we say the love of God dwells in us? The one who came to the earth and poured out of himself to the last drop of blood and water, whose congregation was the deaf, the poor, the blind, the lame and the dead and the leprous. How can we say the love of God is in us if we close our hearts of compassion to those who come into our midst and have the very same need that those did within the generation of Christ? You would think after the day of Pentecost that this would be a non-issue, that we're no longer under the law. We now are alive and the law of life in the Spirit of God in Christ is in us.

So therefore, we would be naturally liberal as it is in generous people. We would naturally be willing to let God flow through us as it is, to give to us that in turn we may have to give to those that have need. But in less than one generation from Jesus Christ, while his half-brother James was still alive, we find the old religious nature finding a foothold one more time among the people of God.

In James chapter 2, if you have time you can turn there. If not, for the sake of time, James chapter 2 verse 1. James is writing, and of course it's to the church at large. He was respected, James, as an elder in Jerusalem, a man of authority.

And he says in James chapter 2 verse 1, he says, My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. In other words, he says, do not come to Christ and all of a sudden start categorizing people, or start respecting or lifting up certain classes of people. He said, if there comes into your assembly a man with a gold ring in goodly apparel, and there comes in also a poor man in vile raiment, vile means dirty clothing, it means filthy, really.

If there comes in a man who's got on a rich ring and a \$5,000 Armani suit, and another man comes in right after him with tattered rags, who doesn't smell good, and you have respect to him that wears the gay clothing, and you say to him, sit here in a good place, and you say to the poor, stand over there, or sit under my footstool. He said, are you not then partial in yourselves and have become judges with evil thoughts? He said, hearken, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him? He said, but you have despised the poor. And here's James writing to the church of his day.

This New Testament church, freshly filled as it is with the Spirit of God, and he says, you've despised the poor. In other words, the word despised means maltreated, dishonored, or you've caused the poor to suffer shame. Now, here's what the Lord put on my heart for this church.

Times Square Church is undoubtedly called to the poorest of the world. I know this in my heart. If you are attending this church, for any amount of time, you know it too.

The Holy Spirit speaks it to you. You don't have to hear it from me or any of the other pastors. You know it.

We are called to the poorest of the world. The Lord is sending us into Africa. We're going to be going back there, Mexico City, perhaps this coming fall.

Different places throughout the world. Pastor David is traveling in Africa and he's going into areas of extreme poverty in some cases. He has met our need.

We are able to go and conduct these medical and social outreaches and gospel crusades in the evening. The last time we went into Jamaica, over 200 people came with us into one of the poorest areas of Jamaica. And did we not see the miraculous power of God? When we went to Nigeria, there was, again, a large contingency of people.

Doctors and dentists, nurses, lay people coming. Those who didn't have medical skill could handle a paintbrush and people just did what they could do. I remember the day when 10,000 people were cramming to get into one of the medical facilities.

And Times Square Church has a reputation now of being a church that goes to the poorest of the world. It's not just a reputation, it's a calling of God. He has given us the ability financially to do this.

We never take an offering. We never ask a pastor or a church or a poor person for a single cent to put in any collection, any offering at any time, anywhere. And by God's grace, we will never take an offering in any of these outreach crusades to the poorest of the world.

Two, three years ago, in prayer, the Holy Spirit told me, He says, you are called to the poorest of the world for the rest of your life. I'm speaking about my life. And I'm believing that it's in unison with this church body.

You are called to the poorest of the poor in places where nobody perhaps will go or has gone before. And you are called to invite them to an incredible banquet. You are called to the lame, the blind, the lepers, the dead, the maimed of our generation.

You are to stand before them. God spoke clearly to my heart. And you are to tell them that a kingdom is coming.

A banquet is being prepared for them. You are to tell them their sins can be forgiven. You are to reach out in every measure that I've enabled you to reach out.

And you are to tell them that even in their poverty, they too are to begin to reach out to their neighbors. You are to tell the Christians to begin to reach out to the Muslims. You are to tell them all that religion without compassion is bankrupt.

And God says, I will move and I will save by the thousands. And surely we've seen that in the last few years. We are called to the poor of the world.

But, beloved, we must be careful how we treat the poor who come in here among us. We are going to the poor, but God forbid that the poor cannot come to us in this house. The Lord is renovating this sanctuary.

This is not the design of man. This is the plan of God. It is being repainted.

It is being reconditioned and brought back to its original glory. Not so we can boast in the provision. I believe with all my heart it's being brought back to this condition to receive the poorest of the poor from New York City that are going to come into these doors.

This is God's way in the physical realm of saying, you are precious to me. I delight in you. All your life, all you've known is shabbiness and rejection and stale, crusty bread.

All your life, all you've known is rejection and downcast looks and the endless numbers of lines you have to stand in and bank on other people's generosity to meet the needs in your house. But God says, I am renovating my house. I'm going to paint it and make it new.

Because I give the best to those I died for. I give the best to those that I love. And within the walls of this house, the Lord says, I have a body.

And when you come into my house, you're going to find Christ. You're going to find the passion of Christ, the compassion of Christ, the generosity of Christ, the gentleness of Christ, the touch of Christ. You're going to find that people are not ashamed to be associated with you.

People who are not given to the feeling that somehow they're being misled because they're following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. These are an unusual people. And even though some may have thousands

or millions of dollars in the bank, there's this funny thing in their heart that they feel it a privilege to be associated with the poor, associated with the downtrodden of society and those that everyone around them has rejected.

The Lord is preparing this building to receive a harvest in New York City. A harvest of young people. A harvest of prostitutes.

A harvest of drug addicts. A harvest of the poorest of the poor of the poor. We must be careful.

You see, God has given us a reputation. But a reputation must be founded in truth. This must always be a house that the poor can come to.

This must always be a place where when a man or woman comes through the door and they don't look too good and their skirts are too short, they're welcomed with open arms. Remember the religious when they invited Jesus to another feast and a woman came in and just fell at his feet and began to worship him and cleansed his feet with her tears and the Pharisee sitting there saying, Oh, if he would know what kind of a woman this is, he would not let her touch him. Oh, beloved, we must be careful.

All through history, I'm reading the scriptures and I'm seeing when the Lord had a controversy with his own people, it was always included in the controversy was an attitude in the heart towards the poor. See, the prophet Amos, he said to his people Israel, you come into my temple and you come to my altar and you cry hot tears. He said, but you're dressed in garments that don't belong to you.

He said, you took them as a pledge. You gave a loan to a poor man and took his garment as a pledge. But under the law, before the sun went down, you were supposed to return it to him and you didn't, you kept it.

And he says, you're wearing what doesn't belong to you. He said, I gave it to you for a purpose. I gave what I gave to you to give to a man who has need.

Isaiah, the Lord says through Isaiah, when he was about to bring his own people into judgment, he says, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. You're not supposed to glean your whole field. You're supposed to leave the corners unharvested.

You're not supposed to go in after the harvest and pick up everything that is left for yourself. You're supposed to leave it in the field for the poor. But he says, you've gone in and you've gleaned the corners and you've picked up everything for yourself.

And he says, the poor come to the field and they find nothing. There's no substance for them, there's no life for them because you've kept it to yourself. It's in your own house.

And Amos, again, the Lord says through Amos, the poor came to my house and they were looking for help and you turned them aside in the gate. You turned them back at the door. We must be careful.

Every usher in this church, every security person, every Christian, be careful now. Be careful how you treat the poor when they come to this house. Be careful how you treat people who don't know the rules yet, who come in and don't understand the conversation.

They've been raised on four-letter words. They walk in the back door, they're just speaking as kindly as they can. They don't even know what's wrong.

They've been raised with a value system that is in poverty, in the spiritual poverty, in a sense, and they're coming in with that value system that reflects in their dress, their attitude. Be very, very careful, Times Square Church. Be very, very careful because this issue is life or death for this church.

Deuteronomy 15 is my last scripture, if you'll go there, please. The fifth book in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 15, verse 6. He says, For the Lord thy God blesses thee as he has promised thee, and thou shalt lend to many nations, and shalt not borrow, but thou shalt reign over many nations, and they shall not reign over thee.

Verse 7, he says, If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother. Now, again, remember, you have to have discernment for this. If somebody walks up to you and they're telling you their financial need in the first two minutes of their conversation, you see, the genuinely poor will quite often never say anything about it.

The Holy Spirit has to speak to your heart. He says in verse 8, But thou shalt open thine hand wide to him, and thou shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he wanted. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand, and that I be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him not.

And he cried to the Lord against thee, and it be a sin unto thee. In other words, he says, Beware of failing to be generous, because you see no personal advantage in it. Verse 10, he says, Thou shalt surely give him, and thy heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him, because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works and all that thou puttest thy hand to.

God says, I will bless you. If you will be a blessing, times for a church to the poor that come within your doors. He said, I will be a blessing to you.

I will bless everything you set your hand to, all your works. Everything I call you to do will have the blessing of God on it. You'll not be confused.

You'll never be confounded before your enemies. The glory of the Lord is going to go with you everywhere you go. Isaiah the prophet says, the Lord says, I'm going to be the light before you.

I'm going to be the glory behind you. When you begin to reach out, you have that open-handed compassion for need. Not just financially, but I'm talking about of ourselves, of that light that God has given to us.

We're open with words of encouragement. We're open with touches of compassion. One day this kid with the three spikes very well may come to this church.

He's going to come to an end of himself. He will end up coming to the house of God or quite conceivably when you get to that level of bondage, you could end up eventually taking your own life. And the life or death sometimes of people is going to be dependent on the reception that they get from God's people in this house.

The Lord says, I'll go before you. I'll go behind you. I will satisfy you in drought.

And even in the worst of times, I'll make you like a watered garden whose waters never fail. He said, I'll make you a builder and not one who tears down. And you're going to be the one who restores the foundation of many generations.

You're going to have people. I can send them to you because of the generosity, the total generosity, because you are willing to give as God gave his son. They're going to come to the knowledge of the truth and you're going to be a rebuild.

They're going to be people in heaven who otherwise may have ended up in hell, but they encountered you, a child of God. And God said, here's a generous man, here's a generous woman that I can pour through. And I'm not talking just resources, but I'm talking oil.

I'm talking the oil, the wine that the man had in his possession on the Jericho Road. I'm talking about the effort. I'm talking about moving beyond just what is convenient.

I'm talking about the encouragement. I'm talking about going out of our way when we come to church to see, if spot, if I can find that new Christian, that new person who came in last week and shake their hand just one more time. I'm talking about that kind of a people will be builders.

That kind of a people, God says, I will lead them to you because I know I can flow through you. I know you'll not be insensitive to the need. You see, you'll never be brought to ruin by obeying God.

I thank God with all my heart that I have obeyed him. As much as I know, I have obeyed him. Where he's called me to go, what he's called me to do.

And it's sometimes been not without a fight. But I have obeyed him. And he's not failed me.

I've not been brought to ruin. I stand before you today provided for. I believe his thoughts are being constantly planted in my mind.

He's opening my mind to an understanding of who he is. He's taking me through my every battle and my enemies are not prevailing over me. Oh, the devil fights hard against what God wants to do in my life.

And some weeks are hard weeks. But my enemy never prevails over me. I will not be brought to ruin by following God.

He's taught me to hold everything I have very, very lightly. Let it just fall through my fingers if he should ask for it. I don't want ensnarements of this world because I have seen thousands and thousands of people come to Christ in Africa.

I've seen it here in New York City. Well, the call is simple this morning. It's for every person in this house.

Now, hear me very clearly. And it's balcony who have this deep inner sense that you're missing something of God. And you're afraid to take that next step.

You're afraid that you're going to be brought to ruin by obeying God. Oh, God, if I if if you ask me for this, I'll be brought to ruin. And so there's always that holding back.

And then, of course, the ultimate of the holding back is coming to church and leaving and saying, well, there was obviously nothing in this for me. That's that's the almost the epitome of a selfish heart, a

religiously selfish heart. You'll not be brought to ruin by obeying God.

And there are many here today. Young people have plans, your plans for your lives. But your plan may not be God's plan.

And unfortunately, he may give you what you desire, but there will be a leanness in your heart all the days of your life. There'll be a leanness in you. I remember when I was leaving to go into full time ministry, there was a Christian policeman at the time who was opposing me.

And it so baffled me. Why is this man opposing me going into full time ministry? And he said to me, well, think about your family. You're leaving a well-paying job to make three hundred and something dollars a week.

And even that was dubious, depending on how many people died that particular week. It would look like financial suicide. And he says, you're giving up your retirement plan and you're giving up your dental plan and you give my teeth.

They're still there, by the way. I've not lost all of them. And he says, you're giving all this stuff up.

And he's standing there and he's opposing me actually responding to the call of God. I said, but God has called me to preach the gospel. And you know what he said to me? He said, I was called once.

And then I knew the root. And he said, I didn't respond. And when he said it, there was such an emptiness in his voice, such an emptiness.

He got what he wanted. He got the pension plan. He got the dental plan.

But he didn't get what God had for him. And nobody can tell you that plan. Don't be running off to meetings looking for a word.

Nobody can tell you that plan. The Holy Spirit is the only one. And he will speak it to your heart.

Nobody else needs to know. He will tell you. He will tell you what he's going to do through your life.

And it can seem so impossible, so far away. But you will not be brought to ruin by obeying God. My altar call is simple.

It's for everyone here who is afraid to take the last step. The rich, young ruler, Jesus said, if you will be complete, here's what you have to do. Let go of your trust.

Open your hand to the poor. And come and follow me. If you will be complete, this is what you have to do.

Today, if the Holy Spirit is speaking to you, now also if you're poor, I'm talking about just poor in spirit as well as physically poor, and you're oppressed by the devil, the Bible says clearly that the Lord stands at your right hand today. That's the hand of strength and power. The Lord stands with you today.

You can come and he will meet your need. He will meet your need. He will touch you.

He will give you confidence in him. You don't have to run around asking anybody for anything. God knows who you are.

And he knows who his people are. And he will look after you. You can be sure that he will look after you.

If you're afraid to take that stand, but in your heart you're saying, God, take away from me a selfish heart. God, you're the only one that can do this. I can't let it go.

I just can't. I can bring it, but you've got to take it, Lord, because I've trusted in these things for too long. I'm going to ask you as we stand to make your way to this altar, and I'm just going to pray a prayer of deliverance for you, just that God set you free and give you an open hand to begin to be the man or woman he's called you to be.

Let's all stand. Balcony. Go to either exit.

Please just make your way down here, main sanctuary. Slip out. You'll not be brought to ruin if you trust God.

If you obey him, he'll not fail you. There are people in this sanctuary. Listen to me now.

You're going to be called back to your country where you came from. That's a word of knowledge, I believe today, that you're afraid. You've come here for the good life.

You're like the rich young ruler, but God says, If I get your heart, I have another plan for you. I'm going to send you where only you can go. You know the language.

You know the culture. You can get into the country. I'm going to send you there.

You say, Lord, help me to trust that I'll not be brought to ruin. I will not be brought to ruin by trusting in you. Make your way here, please.

Lord, first, I just lift up my hands to you, Lord. And I thank you that you are the defender of the fatherless and the widow and the poor. God, those are in this house today that have nobody to defend them.

I pray, God, that you open their heart to trust you as the forgiver of their sin and as their defender, their high tower. God, I thank you, Lord, that you will never fail. You will never forsake anyone who puts their trust in you.

In you, Lord, those that are fatherless find a friend. God, thank you for your goodness now. Thank you, Jesus.

Thank you, Lord. Now, for the rest that have come, let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of this church and Lord of my life, I ask you that in this house the poor and the oppressed who come here will always find a friend, a rich and a warm welcome, a loving hand, a generous heart.

And I pray that they would find it in me, through my life. Lord, open my heart. Open my hands.

Help me to put away things that I trust in that are robbing me of your life. Help me to open my hands and be a channel of your life and your blessing to the poor all around me. Oh, Jesus, thank you that you are preparing this sanctuary, this building, my life.

You are preparing us for a great harvest. Oh, God, thank you for the privilege of loving the same people that you loved, of being released to them. I believe that as I'm released to you, as I trust in you, I will never, I will never, I will never be put to shame.

You will always be with me. You will provide all of my needs. My life will become a glorious testimony of your grace, of your mercy and your provision.

Oh, God, you say you will make me into a spring of water whose waters never fail. You say you will make me a builder and not one who tears down. Oh, God, I receive it.

God, I believe it. I yield the rights to my life. I ask you, Lord, to use my life for your glory.

Oh, God, use me all the days of my life for your glory. Don't let me draw back. Lord, I've come to you to give you all I am and all I have.

I ask you to take it, oh, God. Give me the strength to be your church to this generation on this side of eternity. Oh, God, I believe you.

I believe you with all my heart that you will use my life for your glory. You'll be my supply. You'll be my high tower.

You'll be my strength, my courage, my life from now until the day you take me home. I believe it with all my heart in Jesus' name. Hallelujah.

I believe it, God. I believe it, Lord. I believe it, oh, God.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Now, join with me in prayer for this church.

Pray with me, please. Father, I thank you, God, we lift up Times Square Church before you. We ask you, Lord, all of us, oh, God, that are gathered.

Lord, may this be a place where the poor can come. God, we don't want to be like Sardis that had a reputation, but they were dead. Lord, we want to be alive.

We want your light flowing through us, oh, God. Let what is said about us around the world be true where we are. Let it be true, oh, God, in this sanctuary.

May we never turn a poor person away from our doors. May we never shut our vows of compassion. God, help us.

God, help us to be your church in this city and in our generation until you come and take us home. Father, we thank you. God, we thank you.

From the depths of our heart that you hear our cry and you will answer our prayer. And we thank you in Jesus' mighty name. Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.

Hallelujah. This is the conclusion of the message.

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