



LESSON 9: "Poor Man"

Date: _____

KEY VERSE: Proverbs 21:13 – *"Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard."*

INTRODUCTION

On January 8, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson spoke of a "War on Poverty" in the United States as he addressed the joint houses of congress during his State of the Union address. At that time, the poverty rate in the United States stood at 19%. Johnson's initiatives brought Medicare, Food Stamps, the Job Corp, Head Start and more. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the American poverty rate in 2012 was 16%. Fifty years and billions of dollars to reduce the poverty rate by 3%! Recent studies indicate that the disparity between the rich and the poor in the United States is only increasing.¹

The problem with poverty is not new and is not going away. Jesus said, "The poor always ye have with you" (John 12:8). Just because the war on poverty will not be won does not mean that we should be unconcerned about the condition of the less-fortunate. The Proverbs warn, "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Prov. 21:13).

Poverty is mentioned 46 times in the book of Proverbs. In fact, the authors of Proverbs use several different Hebrew words to picture the plight of the poor. While all of the words referring to the poor in Proverbs are related to those that are in a lower social class, the primary pictures presented by the Hebrew words translated, "poor," or "poverty" in Proverbs are these:

1. **A needy person driven to express a desire for relief (Prov. 14:31b)** — The Hebrew word used in the end of Proverbs 14:31b is, *Nwyba*, (Pronounced - Eb-yone'). It is a word that specifically

speaks of a beggar. This word is found 61 times in the Old Testament and is frequently translated as "needy" or "poor." This word is found four times in Proverbs (14:31b; 30:14; 31:9, 20).

2. **A person who is exhausted or bent low (Prov. 10:15; 14:31; 19:4; 21:13; 22:9, 16; 22:22; 28:3,8, 11, 15; 29:7, 14)** — This is the Hebrew word, *Dal*, which is used 48 times in the Old Testament to speak of someone who is low, weak, or thin. It specifically pictures someone who is exhausted. This word is used to picture the poor 14 times in Proverbs. The word is used in Proverbs 19:17 where we read, "He that hath pity upon the poor (*Dal*) lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again."
3. **To possess or to be dispossessed (Prov. 20:13; 23:21; 30:9)** — This is the Hebrew word, *Yaw-rash*, which is translated "possess" 116 times in the Old Testament. It often speaks of an inheritance gained or lost.
4. **To be humbled by affliction (Prov. 3:34; 14:21; 16:9)** — The word, *Anav*, blends the idea of being humble, poor, lowly, and meek and is used three times in Proverbs.

Sadly, those who find themselves "expressing their need for relief" (*Nwyba*), "exhausted and bent low (*Dal*)," "dispossessed" (*Yaw-rash*) and "humbled by affliction" (*Anav*) are normally despised by culture. The sad fact of class-warfare is made very clear in the book of Proverbs:

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

The New Testament speaks out against the snobbery exhibited by the "haves" to the "have nots."

- James 2:1-9 says, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in

¹ www.alternet.org/americas-rich-are-getting-richer-even-faster-you-thought

yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.”

Theme: God wants us to have wisdom regarding poverty and riches.

Transition: Let’s look carefully at the reasons for poverty which are presented in the book of Proverbs.

REASONS FOR POVERTY

While the problem of poverty is evident and solutions for the problem are constantly suggested, the book of Proverbs speaks specifically to the reasons why some are poor. Though the reasons preferred are not considered to be politically correct in modern America, we must remember that the book of Proverbs is the revelation of God for every culture. God’s Word supersedes and corrects culture. Take note then of the reasons for poverty that are revealed in Proverbs:

1. **Laziness (Prov. 6:6-11)**

Proverbs 6:6-11 encourages the “sluggard” to do a careful study of the ant. Ants have “no guide, overseer, or ruler” (v. 7) to blame for their success or lack of success. In the summer, ants get to work in preparation for the winter and are able to avoid starvation and destruction (v. 8). When people spend too much time sleeping and too little time working the result will be poverty (v. 10-11). The average American will spend 9 years of their life watching television. That’s over 5 hours each day.² The rising generation of Americans spends even more time being entertained by digital devices than watching TV.³ Such inactivity will often lead to poverty. (See also Prov. 10:4; 24:34)

² www.statisticbrain.com/television-watching-statistics

³ www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/01/tv-digital-devices

2. **Stinginess (Prov. 21:20; 11:24)**

While prudence with one’s finances is commendable, stinginess in helping others is not, because stinginess will lead to poverty. Two passages in Proverbs ought to be considered by those who are stingy toward others: 1.) Proverbs 21:20 – “There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up” and 2.) Proverbs 11:24 – “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.”

3. **Drunkness (Prov. 23:21)**

“For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty and drowsiness shall cloth a person with rags” (Prov. 23:21). The expense of buying booze is soon followed by the expense of paying for treatment, losing one’s job, family, reasoning skills, and even freedom. There should be no debate about the fact that drunkness leads to poverty!

4. **Gluttony (Prov. 23:21)**

“For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty and drowsiness shall cloth a person with rags” (Prov. 23:21). Gluttony is closely related to laziness in Proverbs. It’s interesting that as Americans become increasingly obese, there is an increasing disparity between the rich and the poor in America. Further, it’s interesting to note that while prejudice is not tolerated among races, among age-groups, or across gender lines, there is an evident toleration of prejudice against the obese in America.

5. **Greed (Prov. 28:22)**

Proverbs 28:22 says, “He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.” For many years, men and women were enticed to play the lottery with the slogan, “Just imagine being rich!” While very few actually become rich by playing the lottery, many more become poor. Greed leads to poverty.

6. **Stubbornness** (Prov. 13:18)

Without a teachable spirit, there is little chance for personal advancement. “Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honored” (Prov. 13:18). How many employees have lost their employment because of a stubborn spirit?

7. **Lack of compassion** (Prov. 21:13; 22:16; 28:27)

Three times the Proverbs warn that those who cannot empathize with the plight of others will find themselves experiencing poverty (21:13; 22:16; 28:27). God holds the scales of justice and knows how to balance them. Those who demonstrate no compassion will come to poverty.

8. **Lack of discernment** (Prov. 28:19)

“He that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough” (Prov. 28:19). A “vain” person is a worthless, idle, empty person. Wrong companions will lead quickly to corruption (I Cor. 15:33). Bad business deals, bad habits, bad decisions, and bad directions all come as a result of bad friends. Five minutes spent with the wrong friend can lead to a lifetime of poverty.

Everyone ought to take the time to look carefully in the mirror provided in Proverbs. While God may afflict some of His saints like He chose to afflict Job, others will find their own pathway into poverty.

Transition: Having considered the reasons for poverty in the book of Proverbs, let’s look more carefully at the counsel of this book of wisdom for those who would treat the poor rightly.

THE TREATMENT OF THE POOR

The well-being of the wise will be greatly impacted by their treatment of the poor. Proverbs gives careful attention to the results of one’s conduct toward those less fortunate. For those generous toward the poor, blessings are promised. For those indifferent, cruel, and stingy toward the poor, there is sorrow to be suffered.

Proper treatment of the poor will lead to blessing.

In chronological order, the book of Proverbs promises the following blessings for those who treat the poor rightly:

1. **Happiness** (Prov. 14:21)

Proverbs 14:21 assures that, “He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.” Jesus said it this way, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

2. **Honoring God** (Prov. 14:31)

Proverbs 14:31 says, “He that oppreseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.” When the wise are merciful to the poor, God is honored. Those who would live to bring glory to God (I Cor. 10:31) must learn to be kind to the poor.

3. **Assurance of repayment** (Prov. 19:17; 22:9; 28:27)

God promises that those who provide for others will be provided for themselves (Prov. 19:17; 22:9; 28:27). While we are not to “give to get, “ we are assured that as we give, we will get (Luke 6:38).

4. **Increased opportunity for leadership** (Prov. 29:14)

Proverbs 29:14 says that, “The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established forever.” Caring for the poor is close to the heart of God. In II Corinthians 8:9 we read, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” The King of Kings and Lord of Lords left the splendor of heaven for a manger and a cross. His sacrifice made us rich and will cause us to esteem His leadership throughout eternity!

Improper treatment of the poor will lead to sorrow.

Just as there are blessings promised to those who treat the poor rightly, Proverbs promises sorrow to those who abuse the poor.

1. *Improper treatment of the poor is a reproach (Prov. 14:31; 17:5).*

Those who treat the poor poorly are a bad testimony! Treating the poor poorly is not godly. Such conduct fails to reflect the character of God who provides for all.

2. *Improper treatment of the poor brings punishment (Prov. 21:13; 22:16).*

What one sows, one will reap (Gal. 6:7). Those who demonstrate no sympathy when they have opportunity will receive no sympathy when they are in need.

3. *Improper treatment of the poor brings loss of leadership (Prov. 28:15).*

Whether the loss be to the one on the throne, the one in the political arena, or the one in the home, there will always be loss to those who treat poorly the one who has lost everything.

Transition: God cares deeply how we treat the poor and will respond to us accordingly. Let's conclude or consideration of the poor in the book of Proverbs by reviewing the truths about poverty presented in this book.

THE TRUTHS ABOUT POVERTY

There are at least six fundamental truths about poverty that stand the test of time and conclude our study of the poor as presented in the book of Proverbs. Each of these truths ought to be considered with care and prayer.

1. *Poverty may cause despair (Prov. 10:14).*

Proverbs 10:14 warns that, "The destruction of the poor is their poverty." The pages of history are filled with the sad stories of the impoverished who took their own lives, sold their own bodies, and lost all hope. While the despair of poverty is real, the promise that God will supply our "needs" not our "greeds" is also real (Phil. 4:19). Many people allow their self-worth to

be a reflection of their financial holdings and fail to remember that there is a depository in heaven which will never fail (Matt. 6:20).

2. *Poverty may cause humility (Prov. 18:23).*

Proverbs 18:23 says, "The poor useth intreaties." While there are those who would be content to beg, most people would rather starve than think of the humiliation of asking others to provide what they do not have and cannot afford (Luke 16:3). Poverty has a powerful way of bringing humility.

3. *Poverty may cause servitude (Prov. 22:7).*

"The rich ruleth over the poor and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7). In Bible times, those who failed to attend to their financial affairs were placed in debtors prisons or sold into slavery. While the debtors prisons are no more and slavery is a thing of the past, there are those who sell their freedom to serve the Lord to a credit card company or an automobile dealership. Many people take advantage of the ease with which purchases can be made on credit and fail to realize that they are selling their ability to attend church on Sunday, their ability to be at home during the week, and their ability to follow God's calling in their lives. Poverty makes servants out of all!

4. *Poverty may tempt one to steal (Prov. 30:8-9).*

Covetousness is inflamed by hunger, and moral inhibitions are removed by despair.

5. *Poverty is better than lying (Prov. 19:22).*

Proverbs 19:22 is a verse that ought to be well-known by everyone entering business or sales. The verse says, "A poor man is better than a liar." On God's socio-economic scale, the one without any money is better than the one without any honesty!

6. *Poverty is better than cheating (Prov. 28:6).*

“Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich” (Prov. 28:6). “Getting ahead” may come at a cost that ought never be paid.

CONCLUSION

One of the greatest things that we learn from the book of Proverbs is that God sees all men in the same light (22:2; 29:13). God is not impressed by man’s wealth. God sees all men on equal ground.