THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR

A Manifesto for Wealthy Christians

David A. Sims, JD PhD CKA® CEP®
EverSource Wealth Advisors | BRS Consulting, Inc. | Law Office of David A. Sims
Little Rock, Arkansas | Lake Mary, Florida
2026

> *The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor; the wicked does not understand such concern.* **— Proverbs 29:7 (NASB)**

I. A STORY THAT IS NOT YET OVER

Imagine you are invited into a room. Around the table sit some of the wealthiest followers of Jesus Christ on the planet — family office principals, founders of enterprise, billionaire philanthropists, UHNW heirs, and the advisors who serve them. You have been asked to address them about the gospel. About what it means, in this moment of history, to be a steward of great wealth in the kingdom of God.

What do you say?

You could talk about tax strategy. You could talk about legacy planning, dynasty trusts, donor-advised funds, impact investing vehicles. All of these have their place. But none of them — not one — is the thing that Jesus would begin with if he were in the room. And he is in the room.

I would imagine that Jesus would begin where he always seems to begin in such circumstances: with the poor.

Not as a guilt trip. Not as an ideological cudgel. But as a sign. An eschatological marker. A proclamation that the age to come has already broken into the present, and that the people who bear his name are called to be its living evidence.

> *Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.* **— Matthew 11:4–5 (ESV)**

The poor having the gospel preached to them is not incidental to Jesus' messianic credentials. It is central. It is the capstone of his answer to John the Baptist's question from prison: Are you the one who is to come? Jesus' answer is: Look at what is happening to the poor. If you want to know whether the kingdom of God is advancing, watch the poor.

This manifesto is written for those who have been entrusted with much. It is written in the conviction — grounded in Scripture, confirmed by the witness of the church through twenty centuries, and urgently needed in the third decade of the twenty-first century — that the rights of the poor are not peripheral to the gospel. They are a measure of it.

II. WHAT SCRIPTURE ACTUALLY SAYS — AND WHAT WE HAVE CHOSEN NOT TO HEAR

Let us be honest. The majority of wealthy Christians in the West have domesticated the biblical witness on poverty. We have spiritualized what the text leaves stubbornly material. We have individualized what the Scriptures repeatedly frame as structural and communal. We have postponed to the eschaton what the prophets demanded in the present tense.

Leslie Hoppe's careful survey of poverty across the entire biblical canon — from the Mosaic legislation through the prophets and into the New Testament — demonstrates that there is no moment in the scriptural narrative in which concern for the poor is treated as optional, peripheral, or merely aspirational for God's covenant people.[1] The poor are not a footnote. They are a test.

The Mosaic legislation did not merely encourage generosity toward the poor; it legislated it. The gleaning laws of Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 24. The Sabbath year debt release of Deuteronomy 15. The Jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25. These were not suggestions. They were the terms of covenant faithfulness — the structural architecture of a society designed so that, in the words of Deuteronomy 15:4, "there will be no poor among you."

That the ideal was never fully realized in Israel's history is precisely the point. The prophets were not thundering against pagan nations when they indicted the grinding of the poor. They were indicting God's own people — the wealthy elites of Jerusalem and Samaria who had built their prosperity on the backs of those the covenant was designed to protect.

> *They are fat, they are sleek, they also excel in deeds of wickedness; they do not plead the cause of the orphan, that they may prosper; and they do not defend the rights of the poor.* **— Jeremiah 5:28 (NASB)**

Do not miss the structure of that indictment. It is not merely that the Jerusalem elites were wicked in some abstract sense. Jeremiah links their wealth — "they have become great and rich" — directly to their failure to defend the rights of the poor. Their affluence and their indifference are presented not as coincidentally coexisting, but as causally entangled.

This is the prophetic tradition into which Jesus steps when he stands in the synagogue at Nazareth and reads from Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). He then closes the scroll and says, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The Jubilee has arrived. The rights of the poor are not deferred to some distant future. They are inaugurated — now, in him.

Timothy Black's exegetical work on the epistle of James provides the most direct apostolic address to wealthy Christians on this subject in the entire New Testament canon. James is not speaking abstractly. He is writing to real communities in which wealthy members were shaming the poor in the assembly, withholding wages from laborers, and bringing the poor before courts — all while congratulating themselves on their orthodox theology.[2] The verdict of the epistle is unsparing:

> *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.* **— James 5:1–3 (ESV)**

Black's great contribution is to locate this not as a polemic against wealth per se, but as a prophetic summons — in the tradition of Amos and Jeremiah — addressed to those who have made their wealth an idol while the poor sat at their gates. The letter of James is the gospel as social revolution: not the revolution of political violence, but the revolution of a transformed imagination about what wealth is for.

III. WHAT THE EARLY CHURCH KNEW THAT WE HAVE FORGOTTEN

Helen Rhee's remarkable study of wealth, poverty, and early Christian formation reminds us that the church's engagement with the poor was not the invention of the modern social gospel movement, nor of liberation theology, nor of any twentieth-century ideological tendency. It was the assumed, practiced, non-negotiable baseline of Christian identity from the first century through the patristic period.[3]

The early church fathers — Clement of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan — did not treat generosity toward the poor as a supererogatory virtue for especially devout Christians. They treated the accumulation of surplus wealth in the face of neighbor poverty as a form of theft. Not metaphorically. Literally. Basil asks: "The bread you are holding back is for the hungry. The coat you keep locked up is for the naked. The shoes rotting away with you are for those who have no shoes."

This is not socialism. This is the patristic theology of stewardship, grounded in the conviction that all wealth belongs to God and is entrusted to human hands as a means of reflecting his

righteousness — which is, as Proverbs 29:7 declares, a righteousness that knows and cares for the rights of the poor.

Rhee's analysis makes clear that the early church's extraordinary growth in the Roman world was inseparable from its visible, costly solidarity with the poor. When plague struck, Christians stayed and cared for the dying while others fled. When famine came, Christian communities redistributed food across economic lines. When widows and orphans had no legal recourse, the church provided it. The early Christians did not merely preach the rights of the poor. They embodied them — at significant personal cost.

The question for us, in our moment of unprecedented Christian wealth, is not whether this tradition exists. It does, and it is unambiguous. The question is whether we will retrieve it.

IV. THE JUBILEE LOGIC — AND WHY IT CHANGES EVERYTHING

Kim Tan, social entrepreneur and impact investor, has spent decades arguing that the biblical vision of Jubilee is not merely a historical curiosity but a living economic and theological framework that speaks directly to the structures of global poverty today.[4] His argument, developed across multiple works, runs as follows:

The Jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25 was not primarily about individual acts of charity. It was about systemic reset — the periodic return of land to families who had lost it through debt or misfortune, the release of indentured servants, the cancellation of accumulated obligations. It was God's built-in correction mechanism for the inexorable tendency of market economies to concentrate wealth in fewer and fewer hands while the poor lose their footing entirely.

Tan argues — and the New Testament supports him — that the coming of Jesus inaugurated the eschatological Jubilee. Luke 4 makes this explicit: when Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 and announces the "year of the Lord's favor," he is invoking the Jubilee horizon. The question is not whether the Jubilee is theologically valid. The question is what its arrival in Christ demands of those who bear his name and hold his wealth.

Tan's answer — worked out through the Transformational Business Network and decades of social impact investing across the global South — is patient, risk-bearing, locally-embedded private capital. Not charity, which tends to create dependency. Not extractive investment, which tends to concentrate returns among the already-wealthy. But patient equity, deployed with the goal of creating jobs, building local ownership, and generating returns that recirculate through communities rather than exiting to distant shareholders.

This is Jubilee economics in a twenty-first century register. And it is working. In Kenya, in India, in Southeast Asia, in Central America — enterprises backed by patient Christian capital are

providing dignified employment, building local wealth, and demonstrating that the interests of investors and the rights of the poor are not in competition. They are, properly understood, aligned.

> *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* **— Matthew 24:14 (ESV)**

Notice what Jesus links to the end of history: not the accumulation of Western Christian wealth, not the refinement of our theology, not even the growth of our institutions. The proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to all nations. And the gospel of the kingdom, as Matthew 11 makes unmistakably clear, is a gospel whose signs include the poor receiving good news. The telos of history and the rights of the poor are not separate concerns. They are woven together in the eschatological vision of the Lord himself.

V. THE COST AND THE PROMISE — MARK 8 AND 10

Jesus does not leave wealthy disciples with an inspiring vision and no address. He speaks to them directly, repeatedly, and without ambiguity. The two texts that define the shape of costly discipleship for those with much are Mark 8:34–35 and Mark 10:29–30, and they deserve to be read together.

> *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.* **— Mark 8:34–35 (ESV)**
>
> *Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.* **— Mark 10:29–30 (ESV)**

Mark 8 establishes the grammar of discipleship: self-denial, cross-bearing, life-losing for Jesus and the gospel. This is not the grammar of optimized charitable giving within one's comfort zone. It is the grammar of reoriented existence — of a life whose center of gravity has shifted from self-accumulation to kingdom-advance.

Mark 10 provides something richer and more demanding than mere obligation: it provides promise. Those who release — who loosen their grip on houses, lands, and the securities of accumulated wealth for the sake of Jesus and the gospel — receive back a hundredfold in the new community of kingdom belonging, and eternal life in the age to come. Jesus is not asking wealthy disciples to impoverish themselves into misery. He is asking them to trust that the economy of the kingdom operates by different mathematics than the economy of the world.

This is the eschatological imagination that the manifesto tradition has always sought to awaken. Not guilt. Not ideological pressure. But a vision so compelling, a story so true, a promise so certain, that the grip of accumulated wealth loosens — not because we are forced to open our hands, but because we have seen what we are being invited into.

The horizon is Pentecost 2033. Seven years. One generation's length of committed, focused, prayerful, strategic action. The question before every HNW, VHNW, UHNW, and billionaire Christian reading these words is not whether the rights of the poor are real and scripturally grounded. They are. The question is whether we will be among the righteous who know and care for those rights — or whether history will record that we understood such things only in theory, while Lazarus lay at our gate.

VI. A CONCRETE CALL — FIVE COMMITMENTS FOR WEALTHY DISCIPLES

The following is not an exhaustive program. It is an invitation to begin — or to deepen — a journey that the Scriptures, the witness of the church, and the urgency of this moment all demand.

1. See the poor.

You cannot care for what you have never looked at. Kim Tan is right: go to the slums. Visit the underserved communities in your own city. Bring your children. Bring your advisors. Let the reality of poverty — its smell, its texture, its humanity — sink into your bones. This is not poverty tourism. It is the beginning of the epistemological transformation that makes lasting action possible.

2. Recover the biblical vision.

Read the Scriptures through the lends of the poor, the oppressed, the needy. Read Hoppe on poverty in the canon. Read Black on James. Read Rhee on the early church. Sit with Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15 as if you had never read them before — because most of us, functionally, have not. Ask your pastor to preach through them. Commission a theological study for your family office or foundation. The biblical material on the rights of the poor is not thin or ambiguous. It is rich, demanding, and beautiful.

3. Invest with Jubilee logic.

Move a meaningful portion of your investable capital — not a rounding error, but a real allocation — into patient, locally-embedded, job-creating enterprises in poverty-affected regions. The Transformational Business Network, Faith Driven Investor, and Eventide-type frameworks provide proven models. The evidence from decades of social impact investing is clear: this is not

charity. It generates real returns, real jobs, and real dignity — while advancing the gospel in communities that have every reason to be skeptical of Christianity's claims about its God.

4. Give proportionally — and then more.

The tithe was the floor of Mosaic generosity, not the ceiling. For those to whom much has been given, the proportionality of giving should reflect the proportionality of blessing. The Signatry, National Christian Foundation, and similar platforms make it structurally simple to give more, give strategically, and give in ways that mobilize others. The Pentecost 2033 horizon invites a seven-year commitment of accelerating generosity — a personal Jubilee-cycle of intentional, gospel-shaped wealth deployment.

5. Use your influence.

Your LIFE — Labor, Influence, Finances, and Experience-Expertise — is your stewardship portfolio. The wealthiest Christians in the world have access to corridors of power, institutional boards, legislative relationships, and cultural platforms that most people will never touch. Use them. Advocate for policies that protect and extend the rights of the poor. Support lawyers, community developers, healthcare providers, and educators who are doing the slow, unglamorous work of systemic change. Your influence, deployed for the rights of the poor, multiplies the impact of every dollar you give.

A Word of Hope

The story is not over. That is the great good news for those who love the poor and carry the weight of what Scripture asks of those entrusted with wealth.

More than one billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty since 1990. Christian-led social impact investing is generating returns and dignity in communities that aid alone never could. The movement of gospel-driven generosity among wealthy Christians is real, growing, and documented. The Spirit of God is moving.

And the promise of Jesus stands, unchanged and unchangeable: whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. Whoever releases the grip on accumulated security for the kingdom will find, in the community of the kingdom, a hundredfold return — and in the age to come, life itself.

The righteous knows the rights of the poor. The righteous does not merely know them in theory. The righteous acts.

You have been entrusted with much. The poor are at your gate. The kingdom is coming. The question is what you will do, between now and Pentecost 2033, with what has been placed in your hands.

> *He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?* **— Luke 16:10–11 (NASB)**



NOTES

1 Leslie J. Hoppe, OFM, *There Shall Be No Poor Among You: Poverty in the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004). Hoppe's survey moves from the covenant codes of the Pentateuch through the wisdom literature, the prophets, and into the New Testament, demonstrating that concern for the poor is woven into the genetic structure of the biblical canon, not appended to it.

2 Timothy Black, *The Gospel as Social Revolution: The Role of the Church in the Transformation of Society* (Reach Africa, Inc., 2020). Black's exegesis of James is particularly attentive to the socioeconomic context of the letter's original recipients and the gap between their confessed theology and their economic practice.

3 Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012). Rhee's work is indispensable for recovering the patristic consensus on wealth and poverty, which stands in sharp contrast to the therapeutic and acquisitive Christianity that dominates much of the contemporary evangelical landscape.

4 Kim Tan, *The Jubilee Gospel: The Jubilee, Spirit and the Church* (Authentic Media, 2008); Kim Tan and Brian Griffiths, *Social Impact Investing: A New Agenda in Fighting Poverty* (Transformational Business Network, 3d ed., 2022). Tan's work as both a theologian and a practicing investor gives his argument an unusual combination of exegetical rigor and empirical credibility.

David A. Sims is a biblical theologian, lawyer, and wealth, risk, and generosity advisor serving stewards who are passionate about leaving lasting legacies with meaningful impact. He has offices in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Lake Mary, Florida. His doctoral research at Durham University examined consumer capitalism and evangelical formation; his book *The Child in American Evangelicalism and the Problem of Affluence* (Wipf & Stock, 2009) is the scholarly foundation for his ongoing publishing and platform work at the intersection of faith, wealth, and the poor. This essay is part of a larger publishing architecture under development.

Faith • Family • Freedom • Fiduciary • Financial Stewardship

www.littlerock.eversourcewealthadvisors.com | www.brsconsulting.com | www.davidsimsjdphd.com