The Rights of the Poor



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> The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, the wicked does not understand *such* concern (Proverbs 29:7, NASB).
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> A righteous man knows the rights of the poor, a wicked man does not understand such knowledge (Proverbs 29:7, ESV).

Introduction

The poor have rights. The God of creation and new creation in Jesus Christ invests them with rights as divine image-bearers regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, gender, creed, or any other human category of distinction or discrimination. God reveals the rights of the poor generally in creation and specially in the sacred writings of Jews and Christians embraced worldwide and across the millennia.

The pressing questions today are whether *those in authority*, *those with wealth*, and *those with influence* will continue the work of investing time, talent, treasure, and influence to protect, enforce, support, and strengthen those rights and whether they will work to rectify ongoing violations of those rights wherever they are found. These are profoundly crucial and far-reaching questions in the 21st century.

What are the rights of the poor?

Here's how the States Parties of the United Nations frame the poor's rights:

- every human being "has the right to a standard of living adequate to himself and his family, including food, clothing, medical care and necessary social services." Article 25 of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (1948).
- every child (i.e., every human being under the age of legal majority) has an inherent right to life, including health care, nutritious foods, and clean drinking water. U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

Rights asserted, if they are just, should become rights realized. The rights of the poor need further realization in 2022 and beyond. Further support. Further development. Further

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instantiation. There is much work to do. And there is great hope for making significant progress in the decades to come.

But the sobering reality confronting us now is that from 2017 through 2022 as much as 80 percent of the world's population have lived (and still live) at some level of poverty and approximately 400 million children currently live in poverty.

This is not the way things should be (Deuteronomy 15:4). But of course, it is the way things are (Deuteronomy 15:11). And this is why God prescribes in his Law and throughout the Scriptures how his people should relate to the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Proverbs 29:7, 31:8-9, etc.; Luke 4:18, 7:22, etc.; James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18; etc.).

What is poverty? Relative, absolute, and extreme poverties.

Poverty is the lack of basic life necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, sanitation, access to essential healthcare, and the absence of fundamental securities the affluent take for granted. Poverty occurs in severe, moderate, and situational circumstances locally and globally.

Today, in the Web 2.0 era morphing to the Web 3.0 era of human history, poverty is a "glocal"[1] issue touching upon every human being on the planet. It is simultaneously global, out there, and local, right outside our front doors and at just about every traffic intersection.

Some experts talk of "poverties" instead of – or perhaps in elucidation of "poverty" – distinguishing between absolute, extreme, and relative poverties.

Absolute poverty[2] has been described in various ways in economic and monetary terms over the last 80 years in the affluent west (e.g., the absolute or abject poor are those living on less than $1US, $2US, $5US, etc., per day). Hunger. Premature death. Shockingly high mortality rates in infancy and during the first 5 years of life. Intolerably high.

Relative poverty is usually described in economic and relational terms. It is form of deprivation caused by the lack of healthy and nurturing caregivers during the first two decades of life, particularly the first ten years of life. Never enough money. Those malingering in relative poverty know going hungry, they know and experience food insecurity, the anxieties and fears and depression of wondering if they will have meal tomorrow, much less a healthy one. Access to healthy food options are limited for those entangled in the complex webs of relative relational poverty. Major life disruptions caused by divorce, out of wedlock births, abuse, neglect, etc., are very common.

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[1] An adjective defined as, "of or relating to the interconnection of global and local issues" https://www.dictionary.com/browse/glocal (accessed 11/9/2022) and "reflecting or characterized by both local and global considerations" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glocalization (accessed 11/9/2022).

[2] Often discussed along with "extreme poverty" in the literature, but the two are not the same.

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Many experiencing relative poverty have known absolute poverty and fear returning to it. Many fall into relative poverty from the middle class due to unexpected life events such as premature death or incarceration of parents, disease, disability of a parent, unemployment, or divorce of parents.

The *Encyclopedia of Global Justice* helpfully parses "absolute" and "extreme" poverty this way:

> **Absolute poverty** means poverty defined using a universal baseline with no reference to other people's income or access to goods. The failure of meeting this baseline thus means that the individual is poor. **Absolute poverty** is typically discussed *in the context of* ***extreme poverty*** in developing countries, *although absolute and extreme poverty are not synonymous concepts*.
>
> **Absolute poverty** can be defined as the state in which a subject lacks the means to meet his or her basic needs. Such basic needs are often listed in international poverty reduction programs, and usually include food, water, shelter, basic education, and basic medical care. **Extreme poverty** is typically defined as a state in which a person *lacks access to all, or several, of the goods needed for meeting these basic needs*.[3]

Relative, or relational, poverties are very bad, really damaging, and terribly saddening.

Absolute poverties are worse.

Extreme poverties are horrifically worse.

It's just not the way things should be.

Christians, God, Jesus, the gospel, and the poor.

Few Christians living in western affluence get this. Fewer still ever feel, smell, see, touch, or taste it. Few have shared a meal with the poor in her family's hovel, shaken a poor person's hand, listened to their stories, loved them.

This is one of the primary reasons social impact leader, investor and venture capitalist, Dr. Kim Tan,[4] encourages every person wanting to join the good fight of faith in the *bellum* on poverty,

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[3] T. Eskelinen, *Absolute Poverty*, in Chatterjee, D.K., eds., *Encyclopedia of Global Justice* (Springer: Dordrecht, 2011) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5_178 (emphasis added).

[4] See https://springhilluk.com/about-us; https://faithangle.org/speaker/dr-dato-kim-tan; https://www.thewowfactorpodcast.com/show-notes/kim-tan-founder-of-the-transformational-business-network-episode-87.

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in the "social holiness" venture of impact investing with patient equity capital to go and see and smell the slums.

Otherwise, the horrors of the poverty and poverties in the world will never sink into our bones as God desires. If we never engage the poor, transformation of beliefs and practices in relation to the problem of poverty in the world around us does not happen.

Take a trip to Nairobi. Visit the infamous Kibera slum, virtually if not in person.[5]

Or visit any underserved, poor area nearby. They are not difficult to find.

See, feel, hear, smell, and touch what God sees, feels, hears, smells, and touches every nanosecond of every day. Talk to the poor. Shake their hands. Look them in the eye. Smile. Listen and love. They are our neighbors.

Jesus linked the gospel of his death, burial, and resurrection to his ministry to the poor:

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18, ESV).
>
> "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Luke 7:22, ESV).

God's mission of justice/righteousness and new creation inaugurated by the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and current kingly session of Christ at the Father's right hand is inextricably linked to ministry to the poor.

Now. In the 21st century. In our human space and time.

Christians who understand God's call in Christ to join the poor in solidarity and embrace the inextricable link between stewarding the gospel of God's Son and concern for the poor are taking action upon the words of Jesus in the 21st century. They know the rights of the poor. They are the ones demonstrating with shining particularity the righteousness of God "from faith to faith" today.

Christians in the affluent west, particularly those swimming in the various streams of the Reformation, love the doctrine of God's justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone revealed in the Scriptures alone. Saint Paul puts the link between the gospel and righteousness this way:

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[5] "A walk through the biggest slum in Africa" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PmCimD1MMc (accessed 11/7/2022).

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> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.' (Romans 1:16-17)

Paul knew the rights of the poor. He knew God's Law, a Pharisee of Pharisees. Knocked off his high horse of knowledge that "puffs up" by the risen Jesus, he was made righteous by grace through faith in the person and work of God's beloved Son. He lived righteously out of that "alien" righteousness. Surely, he knew Proverbs 29:7 and took it seriously: the righteous man knows and is concerned for the rights of the poor. This is made clear in Galatians 2:10, where he recounts that "James and Cephas and John" reminded him and Barnabas to "remember the poor" in their ministry to the uncircumcised Gentiles, of which he says, "the very thing I was eager to do."

Jesus, of course, as the only perfectly righteous human to walk the earth, was a righteous man who knew Proverbs 29:7 as well.

But he was more than that, much more.

He became poor, redeeming both poor and rich alike and thereby making all "rich" in relation to God and each other (2 Cor 8:9). As God's beloved Son, Jesus fulfilled the rights of the poor in his fulfillment of the Law, Psalms and Prophets through the gospel of his death, burial, and resurrection (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39). This is the transformative, hope-inducing "already" of redemptive history's the "already, not yet" that moves God's people into good works on behalf of the poor (Titus 2:11-14, 3;14; 1 Tim 6:18-19).

The "not yet" is seen in the problem of poverty and poverties in our world today, which unequivocally manifest the deleterious effects of living in a fallen, groaning cosmos as the tension in texts such as Romans 8:22-23 and Deuteronomy 15:4, 11 demonstrate.

Those who want to help alleviate the suffering of those in poverty must join in the groanings of creation revealed in, among other things, the inconsolable groanings of the poor. We must somehow figure out how to get it into our bones, under our skin, just as Jesus and Paul and the apostles and hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters in Christ have done throughout the centuries and are doing today.

Who are the poor?

The poor are those who know the groaning of creation and the groaning inwardly that comes with their poverties. What many of us western, white, evangelical,[6] Bible-believing, Reformed

[6] This much maligned word, malignantly co-opted in American media and politics, needs clarification and defense today. For me as a practical theologian, it means Jesus-and-the gospel-centered orthodoxy and orthopraxis along the lines of biblical-redemptive-historical orthodox lines set out in texts such as Mark 8:31/9:31/10:23-14; 1 Cor

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Christians[7] neither realize nor experience is that millions upon millions of the poor in the world today are our Christian brothers and sisters, sitting right outside our gates (metaphorically speaking, and in some instances literally outside the secure, guarded gates of those with high, very-high, and ultra-high net worths[8]).

The poor in our world today are those who live in poverty and in their particularized poverties. They are everywhere. They are not hard to find or see. They are everywhere. They are, in a truly biblical sense, our neighbors. We literally can do good to them and for them whenever we want (Mark 14:7). The problem lies mostly in the wanting, because we have the poor neither in our consciousness nor our consciences. Worse, most affluent Christians make no effort to get the poor into their consciousness and therefore never become conscientized to the problem of poverty in their world and the poverties of the poor surrounding them.

We would do well, I suggest, to take a fresh look at the poor through the lens of the Scriptures. Here are three places to start.

First, take a look at how James defines the poor: "Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?" (James 2:5).

> God chose the poor in the world to be (1) rich in faith and (2) heirs of the kingdom.
>
> We should read that carefully again.
>
> > God chose the poor in the world to be rich in faith.
> >
> > God chose the poor in the world to be…heirs of the kingdom.

15:1-4; James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18, etc. It is distinctly different from "Evangelical" which signifies western, social, cultural, economic, and political descriptors through various media outlets. For a fuller treatment of the delineations between "evangelical" and "Evangelical" see my discussion in chapter 1 of *The Child in American Evangelicalism and the Problem of Affluence* (Sisters, OR: Wipf and Stock/Pickwick, 2009).

[7] The religious-socioeconomic-subcultural context from which I write.

[8] According to Investopedia, high net worth individuals (HNWIs), very-high net worth individuals (VHNWIs) and ultrahigh net worth individuals (UHNWIs) are defined as those with $1M - $4M, $5M - $29M, and $30M of liquid/investible assets, respectively. As of 2021, the United States had the highest numbers of all three categories. See https://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/hnwi.asp and https://www.investopedia.com/terms/u/ultra-high-net-worth-individuals-uhnwi.asp (accessed November 9, 2022). The number of rich people in the world today is staggering, particularly in view of the number of people living in poverty. The other category of rich people today are the "super-rich" persons. "From 2020 to 2025, the ranks of the ultra-wealthy will grow by 27%, according to Knight Frank. Asia will see the most growth (39%), followed by Africa (33%). The U.S. will continue to have the most UHNWIs by 2025, adding 24% super-rich individuals." Knight Frank, "The Wealth Report 2021," page 83 (accessed November 9, 2022).

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Say what?

Rich in faith.

Heirs of the kingdom, heirs of God's reign and rule.

They have inherited and will inherit God's kingdom?

We do well to let James 2:5 hang in our Christian consciousness and hopefully simmer into our consciences. I commend further reading along these lines in the footnote below.[9]

Second, let's look at the relationship between Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16.

Jesus tells us that Lazarus was "laid" at the gate of Dives. The rich man ignored him, neglected him. I encourage you to read Luke 16:19-31 carefully, meditatively, prayerfully. Invite Holy Spirit to speak to you from this text, to bring to your consciousness what God would have you hear and know and do in your particular 21st century "glocal" (global-local) context.

Oysterband captured the unbelieving heart of Dives quite well with these 1990 lyrics:

thou art none of mine, brother Lazarus
that lies begging at my door
no meat, no drink I'll give to thee
nor bestow upon the poor

then Lazarus laid him down and down
even down at Diverus' wall
some meat, some drink, brother Diverus
or with hunger starve I shall

thou art none of mine, brother Lazarus
that lies begging at my wall
no meat, no drink I'll give to thee
but with hunger starve you shall

then Lazarus laid him down and down

[9] Timothy Black, *The Gospel as Social Revolution: The Role of the Church in the Transformation of Society* (Reach Africa, Inc., 2020); Kim Tan and Brian Griffiths, *Social Impact Investing: New Agenda in Fighting Poverty* (London: Transformational Business Network, 3d ed., 2022); Kim Tan, *Jubilee and Social Justice: A Dangerous Quest to Overcome Inequalities* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2021); Kim Tan, *The Jubilee Gospel: The Jubilee, Spirit and the Church* (UK: AbeBooks/Authentic Media, 2008).

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even down at Diverus' gate
some meat, some drink, brother Diverus
for Jesus Christ His sake

thou art none of mine, brother Lazarus
that lies begging at my gate
no meat, no drink I'll give to you
for Jesus Christ His sake[10]

Third, read Matthew 25:14-46 carefully. Reflect on it. See the link between talent (i.e., entrusted wealth) stewardship and the final judgment.

And do not pass over quickly verses 31-46. These verses comfort the afflicted and afflict (or at least should afflict) the comfortable. Pay particular attention to the words of Jesus in verses 40 and 45:

> "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

> "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did not do it to me" (Mt 25:45).

Then, in light of these words of Jesus, let the words of James and John sink in:

> "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:14-17).

> "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:16-18).

The poor are our "glocal" neighbors. It is important to remember that each person experiencing poverty has his or her own story. We should listen. We should help.

Each person malingering in poverty in any form has dignity, worth, and value. They are God's image bearers. And many, if not most, are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

[10] "Dives and Lazarus" http://www.oysterband.co.uk/lyrics/songs/Dives_and_lazarus.html (accessed 11/3/2022).

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The Fight Against Poverty: 1948 – 2022

Since 1948, the States Parties to the United Nations Charter have invested significant energy, time, and financial resources toward realizing the rights of the poor.

Significant progress has been made since 1990. But much more is needed.

The World Bank's 2022 report titled, "Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course" sums up the fight against poverty between 1990 – 2020 as follows:

> COVID-19 marked the end of a phase of global progress in poverty reduction. During the three decades that preceded its arrival, more than 1 billion people escaped extreme poverty. The incomes of the poorest nations gained ground.
>
> By 2015, the global extreme-poverty rate had been cut by more than half. Since then, poverty reduction has slowed in tandem with subdued global economic growth. The economic upheavals brought on by COVID-19 and later the war in Ukraine produced an outright reversal in progress. It became clear that the global goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030 would not be achieved. Given current trends, 574 million people—nearly 7 percent of the world's population—will still be living on less than US$2.15 a day in 2030, with most in Africa.
>
> In 2020 alone, the number of people living below the extreme poverty line rose by over 70 million. That is the largest one-year increase since global poverty monitoring began in 1990. Looking at poverty more broadly, nearly half the world—over 3 billion people—lives on less than US$6.85 per day, which is the average of the national poverty lines of upper-middle income countries. Using that measure, poverty persists well beyond Africa. The prevalence and persistence of poverty darken the outlook for billions of people living around the world.[11]

Dr. Kim Tan of the Transformational Business Network has made the salient point on numerous occasions that the continent of Africa has received the equivalent of six (6) Marshall Plans post-World War II. Aid and charity have not been the most effective means of alleviating poverty. It has certainly helped, but the track record in Africa belies its efficiency, sustainability, and long-term efficacy.

What is needed is investment. Social impact investing, in the vein of the Transformational Business Network and similar organizations and networks around the world that are proving

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[11] World Bank. *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course*. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1893-6. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO (https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/37739/9781464818936.pdf).

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that providing what Dr. Tan and Lord Brian Griffiths describe as "patient" private equity and venture capital results in sustainable and profitable (yes, *profitable*) solutions to poverty.[12]

More on this practical, proven, and inspiringly hopeful movement below.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind our shared recent history. Inordinate adverse impacts on the poor have been caused by the convulsive crises of 2020 (COVID-19 pandemic), 2021 and 2022 (economic shutdown, supply chain disruptions, de-globalization, Putin's barbaric war on Ukraine, inflation, the looming global recession). Added to this are many financial and investment experts' expectations that the 2020s will witness ongoing choppy and volatile "risk-off" market performance, as well as social, cultural, political, and historical tumults, including potential famines around the globe.[13]

Things could get much worse for the poor this decade. Affluent Christians worldwide must be ready to help. As I discuss more fully below, a movement is afoot among wealthy Christians in the world today entrusted with investible wealth estimated to be as high as $130 Trillion who are motivated to take the fight to poverty in creative, innovative, and sustainable ways.[14]

As hard as the 2020s and perhaps even the 2030s may be, there is great reason to believe that God's faithful stewards of God's wealth can significantly help their poor brothers and sisters through social impact investing and radical generosity.

We must always remember that the God's Messiah and Son are on the throne and his kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. You can take that to the bank. Both God's and yours.

The Rights of the Poor in Redemptive History

According to ancient Jewish wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs 29:7), knowing the rights of the poor and being concerned for the rights of the poor is a mark of the "the righteous."

Conversely, having no concern or knowledge of the rights of the poor is a mark of "the wicked."

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[12] Kim Tan and Brian Giffiths, *Social Impact Investing: New Agenda in Fighting Poverty* (Transformational Business Network: London, 3d ed., 2022). For my wife, Tamara, and I, as well as many of our brothers and sisters in Christ, we want to invest our lives in making *kingdom impact investments* of time, money, wealth, and expertise and helping others experience the joy of these kind of investments curated specially for our brothers and sisters in Christ locally and around the world.

[13] See, e.g., George Friedman, *The Storm Before the Calm: America's Discord, the Coming Crisis of the 2020s, and the Triumph Beyond* (New York: Doubleday, 2020); Peter Zeihan, *The End of the World is Just the Beginning: Mapping the Collapse of Globalization* (New York: Harper Business, 2022); "A global food crisis" https://www.wfp.org/global-hunger-crisis (accessed 11/27/2022).

[14] For a handful of exciting teasers, visit the following sites: https://www.enterprisesolutionstopoverty.com/about; https://www.enterprisesolutionstopoverty.com/stories; https://www.tbnetwork.org/impact-report2020; https://tbn-americas.org/case-studies; https://www.trustbridgeglobal.com.

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> The righteous is concerned for (ESV: knows) **the rights of the poor**, the wicked does not understand *such* concern (ESV: knowledge).
>
> Proverbs 29:7 In Context | Full Chapter | Other Translations

Jewish prophetic tradition fingers "wicked men" found among God's chosen people (Jer 5:26) living in Jerusalem, the capital city of the Southern kingdom of Israel (i.e., Judah), who "have become great and rich" (Jer 5:27) and who do not defend the rights of the poor.

Don't miss that. Jeremiah indicts the Jerusalem elites and their kings and explicitly links their becoming "great and rich" with failing to defend "the rights of the poor" (and to plead "the cause of the orphan" – these two phrases may properly be considered a hendiadys).

> They are fat, they are sleek, they also excel in deeds of wickedness; they do not plead the cause, the cause of the orphan, that they may prosper; and they do not defend **the rights of the poor**.
>
> Jeremiah 5:28 In Context | Full Chapter | Other Translations

God is really serious about the rights of the poor. Just read the rest of Jeremiah. It makes the hair on the back of you neck stand up. At least it does mine.

> **Judgment Must Come**
>
> **15** Then the LORD said to me, "Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me,
> My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go! **2** And it shall be that when they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you are to tell them, 'Thus says the LORD:
>
> > "Those *destined* for death, to death;
> > And those *destined* for the sword, to the sword;
> > And those *destined* for famine, to famine;
> > And those *destined* for captivity, to captivity."'
>
> **3** I will appoint over them four kinds *of doom*," declares the LORD: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag off, and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. **4** **I will make them an object of horror among all the kingdoms of the earth because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem**.

What did Manasseh do?

> "He did evil in the sight of the LORD according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel" (2 Chron 33:2).

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Actually, it's worse than that. Much worse.

> "Manasseh shed **very much innocent blood** until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; besides his sin with which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD (2 Kings 21:16).

Manasseh's 55-year reign and rebuilding program involved the idolatrous, greedy grinding of the rights of the poor, the powerless, the innocent, the dependent, the weak, the voiceless. Children. The poor. Women. Slaves. The stranger.

> "…he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he also erected altars for the Baals and made Asherim, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. **4** He built altars in the house of the LORD of which the LORD had said, "My name shall be in Jerusalem forever." **5** For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. **6** **He made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom**; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him *to anger*. **7** **Then he put the carved image of the idol which he had made in the house of God**, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; **8** and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will observe to do all that I have commanded them according to all the law, the statutes and the ordinances *given* through Moses." **9** Thus Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem **to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the sons of Israel**" (2 Chron 33:9).[15]

Wicked kings like Manasseh don't get along alone. They always have help and support from those who become "great and rich" and grow "fat and sleek" from the authority's injustice and immorality.

> For wicked men are found among my people;
> they lurk like fowlers lying in wait.
> They set a trap;
> they catch men.
> Like a cage full of birds,
> their houses are full of deceit;
> therefore they have become great and rich;
> they have grown fat and sleek.

[15] As an aside but not entirely unrelated to the topic of the poor's rights, I have long thought (since 1987) that we may very well be living in Manasseh's United States. And despite all the rejoicing on the right and hand-wringing on the left over the Supreme Court's June 2022 *Dobbs v Jackson* decision in June 2022 reversing the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision handed down in 1973, I suspect that we may still be living in it. But that's for another time.

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They know no bounds in deeds of evil;
 they judge not with justice
the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper,
 and they do not defend the rights of the needy (poor, NASB).

Jeremiah 5:26-28 (ESV)

Who are the "great and rich" and the "fat and sleek" who in the 21st century "judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and…do not defend the rights of the needy [poor]?"

Trampling the rights of the poor brings nothing good for God's people. Only bad. It brings God's wrath. There are consequences for failure to defend the rights of the poor.

The overarching point Jeremiah makes is that Israel failed in its mission and calling to be a light to the nations. Israel failed in every aspect of the Mosaic Law, turning to idolatry, to other gods that are no gods at all. The historical books of the Old Testament and the Psalms recount Israel's history and the fulfillment, partially, of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (renamed Israel). David and Solomon represent the pinnacle of historic fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs. But both of them fell short of God's glory. And their offspring fell even shorter. Northern Israel fell in 722 B.C. Southern Israel (Judah) fell in 586 B.C. with its idolatrous trampling of the rights of the poor.

A new, final king was needed who would bring in an everlasting kingdom of God's righteous and benevolent reign. A new, final prophet was needed to bear witness to the final truth (i.e., the gospel). A new, final high priest was needed to mediate not just between God and his chosen people, the Jews from whom salvation comes, but also to reconcile and make peace in one body between Jew and Gentile and to mediate between God and the new humanity created in the Second Adam Jesus Christ.

The Mosaic Law and the Poor

Under the Mosaic legislation, the "poor" are those without land or without the economic, legal, and political resources to support and to be self-sustaining households. The poor are a diverse group of the marginalized, dispossessed, disenfranchised, powerless. They are subsistence farmers, day workers, indentured slaves, beggars, widows and orphans, prostitutes, the chronically infirm, and sojourners/resident aliens (see, e.g., Genesis 16; Exodus 22:21, 23:6-9; Deuteronomy 10:17-19, 15:1-11, 24:14-22; Leviticus 19:9-10 and 33-34, 23:22).

God is concerned about the poor. God knows the rights of the poor because he gave them to all humans in creation and then legislated them through Moses. God is perfectly righteous. The righteous know and are concerned for the rights of the poor.

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Jesus was the righteous one who makes all who believe righteous by faith and empowers all who believe to live by a faith that justifies. At the heart of the practical faith is a faith that expresses itself in concern for and knowledge of the rights of the poor. According to James, it's an active faith that cares for the poor and their rights.

> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world (James 1:27).
>
> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:14-17).

The apostle John agrees:

> By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Jesus, the Mosaic law, Prophets, and Psalms

We have already seen that Jesus, through the gospel, fulfilled all that was written about him in the Scriptures (as John puts it), all that was written about him in the Law, Psalms and Prophets (as Luke puts it).

In this, Jesus fulfilled all that was written about God's righteous concern for and establishment of the rights of the poor.

So, redemptive history has its beginning and its end in the eternal Son of God, the firstborn of creation and the firstborn of re-creation (i.e., the firstborn from the dead).

Jesus is the second, final Israel. He is the final king, prophet, and high priest. He and the church are the final temple, tabernacle, dwelling place of God. He is the second Adam, the head of the new humanity. All this is from God, by whose doing all who believe are "in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.'"

When Jesus returns, he will bring heaven to earth. He will unite God's will on earth as it is in heaven, making the kingdoms of this world his in fulfillment of all the prayers of the saints over the millennia, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

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Then the rights of the poor will finally be realized.

Redemptive History's Actors

Until that kingdom comes and God's will is done, until the rights of the poor are fully and completely realized, we must strive to invest and give and serve and advocate on behalf of the poor and their rights.

God's children everywhere, particularly those who enjoy affluence now, are agents of redemptive history. They are agents of God's mighty acts of liberation and freedom through the gospel for the poor.

Here is how Jesus and the apostles put it for us.

> …let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).
>
> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).
>
> …godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life (1 Timothy 6:6-19).

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> Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works,…For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:7-14).
>
> …when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people….And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful (Titus 3:4-14).

As agents of redemptive history, we are called to pursue good works on behalf of the poor. We must see that the good works prepared beforehand in ministry of the gospel are, by biblical definition, good works linked to the rights of the poor.

We are called to administer our gifts as fiduciaries, as trustworthy servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God in Christ (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). Peter puts it this way: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10).

The Good News about Gospel Stewardship in the 21st Century

I mentioned earlier that I would share some exciting things about what God is doing through his children to whom he has entrusted significant wealth. It seems to have begun in embryonic form around the year 2000. Increasingly, Christians are both giving more of their income and wealth to and *investing* their wealth in kingdom-expanding ventures with the rights of the poor in focus and with poverty relief, alleviation, reduction, and elimination as the goals.

Despite all the bad news in the world today, there is great reason to rejoice, to hope, and to work as if everything depends on God’s children entrusted with wealth, expertise, and influence and to pray as if everything depends on God! Jesus is still enthroned, interceding for the rights of the poor according to God’s will, sustaining all things by the word of his power, expanding God’s reign on earth as it is in heaven. And we can be assured that his words will be fulfilled in due time: “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).

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It is not possible to mention everything that is happening in this space of gospel-centered, biblically-grounded, joy-empowered, faith-driven entrepreneurship and investing. The heart of the movement is expressed in two interrelated dimensions: (1) biblical generosity and (2) social impact investing focused on poverty relief, not through aid/charitable donations, but through "patient equity" finance and investment in small to medium business enterprises.

Here is an all-too-brief, yet essential and substantive, summary of what's been happening from 2000 through 2022 in the generous giving movement fueling social impact investing. There is so much more happening, but for now this must suffice:

- 2000: the Generous Giving movement was launched by the McClellan Foundation (https://generousgiving.org/who-we-are), which has helped to create a movement of generous and joyful stewards motivated to leave kingdom-expanding legacies for the good of others and glory of God.
- 2003: Kim Tam and Stuart McGreevy started the Transformational Business Network, which is focused on social impact investing and has grown to over 2,000 members across 7 countries (https://www.tbnetwork.org/about).
- 2022: funded by the John Templeton Foundation, the *Christian Enterprise Solutions to Poverty Field Guide* was published – "The first-ever landscape analysis of Christian organizations providing Enterprise Solutions to Poverty" – via a partnership between the Ormond Center at Duke Divinity School, Thriving Cities Group, and Belmont University https://www.enterprisesolutionstopoverty.com/about (citation to the Field Guide: Amy L. Sherman and Josh Yates, *Christian Enterprise Solutions to Poverty* (Duke Divinity School, 2022).
- 2022: Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, announces its formal partnership with Dr. Kim Tan and the Transformational Business Network at its inaugural Hope Summit held October 24-26 (https://president.belmont.edu/hope-summit-sched-2).

Wrapping up: Aslan is on the move!

I conclude with this.

"They say Aslan is on the move-perhaps has already landed."

The Beaver in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

Since April of 2022 when I met this chap named Kay Hiramine, a strange sense has begun settling over me much like the children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, sort of dream-like. It's like the Beaver is speaking on the issue of the rights of the poor, and God's children in the narrative have this gut sense that something is not right in the world with all this wealth right in the midst of all this poverty. We have got to do something about it.

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I'm not sure I fully understand what this Holy Smokes creator and Jesus-and-the-gospel netweaver has gotten me into, but it appears to be something big. Generous Giving. Social Impact Investing. God's heart for the poor exploding in 2022.

And of course, both he and I and all of us know who is weaving the tapestry of redemption for the poor. As children of the only true and living God in Christ (1 Tim 1:17; Jn 17:3; 1 Jn 5:20; Jer 10:10; Is 43:11), we know it's the Lord Jesus, the Spirit "from glory to glory" (2 Cor 2:17-18).

> We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.
>
> And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.
>
> Little children, keep yourselves from idols.
>
> 1 John 5:19-21 (ESV)

We should not move too fast from how the apostle John concludes his first epistle. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." What were the idols confronting our first century brothers and sisters in Christ? They were many. And there are many now. One perennial sign that the world continues to be full of idols is the presence and grinding of the poor, the groanings of poverty in the world today. Keep in mind how Paul puts a fine point on the interplay and inseparable link between the last and first commandments in the Mosaic Law: "greed, which amounts to idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).

God in Christ is on the move in 2022 to further the work of instantiating the rights of the poor. May his children throughout the earth hear and heed the Spirit's call to generous giving and generous investing on behalf of the poor. And may we all take to heart Proverbs 29:7 as we proceed forward in this great work, understanding that knowledge of and concern for the rights of the poor is fundamental to justice, to righteousness.

As I reflect back over the past 7 months, echoes of that classic 1975 song "Dream Weaver" sung by Gary Wright resound in my mind along with those mystical feelings I felt when I listened to it at age 14. I'm beginning to see how the strands of my life have been woven by God since 1961 and more recently from 2000 when I began my postgrad work in the north of England at the University of Durham's Department of Theology and Religion. I realize that my brothers and sisters in Christ and I are all woven and wrapped into this drama of redemption in Christ by the Ultimate Netweaver and are called to work for the rights of the poor.

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May the work at Belmont and the partnership between Belmont and the Transformational Business Network prosper. May the "social holiness"[16] of God's people shine brightly as the sun, magnifying Christ and glorifying God through good works of social impact investing and generous giving that God has prepared beforehand to walk humbly into by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10). And may the faith-driven entrepreneur and investor movements continue to expand through trustworthy servants of Christ stewarding God's mysteries (1 Cor 4:1-2).

May it be so for the greater glory of God and for the good of the poor.

[16] Kim Tan's phrase induced from his pioneering biblical work on the Jubilee and intentionally deployed to differentiate social impact investing from the negative aspects of the "social justice" and "social gospel" movements in the west, particularly the United States.

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