

## MERCY MINISTRY II

### (1) Review: Helping the poor is both a matter of mercy *and* justice.

#### **Isaiah 1:17**

Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

#### **Micah 6:8**

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

#### **Deuteronomy 10:17-19**

<sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. <sup>18</sup> He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

### (2) In the Old Testament, Israel was supposed to be a nation where the poor would not suffer want because society and laws were just and equitable.

#### **Deuteronomy 14:28-29 [Tithing]**

<sup>28</sup> At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithes of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. <sup>29</sup> And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.

#### **Deuteronomy 15:1-8 [The Sabbatical Year]**

<sup>1</sup> At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. <sup>2</sup> And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD'S release has been proclaimed. <sup>3</sup> Of a foreigner you may exact it, but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release. <sup>4</sup> But **there will be no poor among you**; for the LORD will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess – <sup>5</sup> if only you will strictly obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all this commandment that I command you today. <sup>6</sup> For the LORD your God will bless you, as he promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow, and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you. <sup>7</sup> If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, <sup>8</sup> but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

### **Leviticus 25:8-10, 23-28 [Year of Jubilee]**

<sup>8</sup> You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. <sup>10</sup> And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when **each of you shall return to his property** and each of you shall return to his clan.

<sup>23</sup> The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me.

<sup>24</sup> And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land. <sup>25</sup> If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold. <sup>26</sup> If a man has no one to redeem it and then himself becomes prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it, <sup>27</sup> let him calculate the years since he sold it and pay back the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and then return to his property. <sup>28</sup> But if he has not sufficient means to recover it, then what he sold shall remain in the hand of the buyer until the year of jubilee. In the jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property.

### **Leviticus 19:9-10 [Gleaning Laws]**

<sup>9</sup> When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. <sup>10</sup> And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

**(3) Just like OT Israel, the NT church is to be a community where people share and there is no poverty.**

### **Acts 4:32-35**

<sup>32</sup> Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but **they had everything in common**. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> **There was not a needy person among them**, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

### **2 Corinthians 8:10-15**

<sup>13</sup> I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as **a matter of fairness** <sup>14</sup> your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. <sup>15</sup> As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

**(4) The diaconal office administers the church's mercy.**

### **Acts 6:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in **the daily distribution**. <sup>2</sup> And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup> But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." <sup>5</sup> And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup> These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

## **(5) Mercy is gospel reenactment.**

### **2 Corinthians 8:7-9**

<sup>7</sup> But as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you – see that you excel in this act of grace also. <sup>8</sup> I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. <sup>9</sup> For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

### **Deuteronomy 10:17-19**

<sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. <sup>18</sup> He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

## **(6) God identifies with the poor.**

### **Proverbs 19:17**

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

### **Luke 2:7**

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

### **Matthew 25:34-40**

<sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

<sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?”

<sup>40</sup> And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

**(1) Review: Helping the poor is both a matter of mercy *and* justice.**

We tend to think of mercy and justice as opposed to each other – and helping the poor as only a matter of mercy. But Scripture makes clear that it is both. We see the justice aspect in **Isaiah 1:17**. We are to seek justice. How? By correcting oppression, loving the orphans and advocating for widows. These are the powerless of society. **Micah 6:8** – “do justice and love mercy.” The way Hebrew works, these are not separate activities, but one and the same.

**Deut. 10:17-19**. We see the mercy aspect here. We are to love the sojourner (immigrant) – why? Because Israel was once a sojourner in Egypt, and God had mercy on them. And so mercy ministry is really gospel reenactment.

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**(2) In the Old Testament, Israel was supposed to be a nation where the poor would not suffer want because society and laws were just and equitable.**

**Deuteronomy 14:28-29 [Tithing]**

One of the purposes for the tithe, alongside supporting the Levites (ministry personnel), was to provide aid for the poor.

**Deuteronomy 15:1-8 [The Sabbatical Year]**

One of the ways the poor stay poor is through crushing debts. Charging exploitative interest rates was outlawed. And to create an equitable society, every 7 years, all debts were forgiven. In this way, systemic chronic poverty was to be eliminated in Israel (v. 4).

**Verses 7-8** – Ah, we might say. If in seven years, my loans will be forgiven, I shouldn't lend to those who might not pay me back. This is against the will of God. We are to show compassion on the poor and lend what they need. What's interesting here is that the poor don't need a handout. They need assistance to become self-sufficient. But these assistance loans can become crushing burdens – perpetuating poverty. When that happens, even the debts are to be forgiven.

**Leviticus 25:8-10, 23-28 [Year of Jubilee]**

Every seventh sabbatical year, not only are all debts to be forgiven, but all property was to be returned. In the beginning, God allocated a portion of land to all the tribes and all the families. The land was perfectly distributed so that everyone had enough and no one had too much. But of course, over the course of time, some families would do better than others and some families would fall into poverty and debt. And so land would be bought and sold. Over time, this would create a greatly inequitable society where a few own all the land and many poor have nothing. The Year of Jubilee redressed that inequity. Every 50<sup>th</sup> year, all land was returned to their original owners and so no one could become too rich and no one could become too poor.

But in the interim time, any land that was sold was essentially a loan. If a family fell into financial ruin and had to sell under duress, than that land was not considered to be permanently gone. The land was always allowed to be “redeemed” – purchased out of debt. Usually, that task fell to a relative – called a “kinsman redeemer.” If no kinsman redeemer had the means, than the land would at least be returned in the Year of Jubilee.

### **Leviticus 19:9-10 [Gleaning Laws]**

Notice how the poor are to be helped. Not through handouts, but by giving them a chance to earn their own living. Farmers were not to harvest their crops up to the edge, but were to leave some marginal lands for the poor to earn their own living. This is the sort of provision the poor were giving.

### **(3) Just like OT Israel, the NT church is to be a community where people share and there is no poverty.**

**Acts 4:32-35.** Some might say – oh well, that was the Old Testament. But the same principle applies in the NT church. Just like in Israel, there was to be no poor and the rich were to share their wealth.

**2 Corinthians 8:10-15.** Paul is talking about the Jerusalem collection. This was a major undertaking by Paul to make a collection from the richer Greek churches to support the poor in Jerusalem. Notice the argument Paul makes. It is not merely a matter of mercy (though it is), but it is a matter of fairness (justice). It is fundamentally unjust that the poor should suffer while the rich are doing well.

As biblical support, Paul cites Exodus 16 – the story of manna. God provided manna from heaven, but he instructed his people to so share what they gathered so that no one had too much and no one had too little. The rate of gathering might be differentiated, but the consumption was the same. What does this tell us? Deep theology. Manna, like all resources (money), is a pure gift from God. Some have greater capabilities of gathering manna. But in the end, everyone is to share. No one was to hoard more than they needed. Otherwise, the manna would rot.

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### **(4) The diaconal office administers the church's mercy.**

**Acts 6:1-6.** We see the division of labor in the church. The apostles devoted themselves to preaching the word and prayer. The deacons were to focus on the mercy ministry of the church.

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### **(5) Mercy is gospel reenactment.**

Extending mercy to the poor is reenacting the gospel – God's mercy to us who were poor. So that when we give mercy to others, we proclaim the gospel.

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### **(6) God identifies with the poor.**

**Proverbs 19:17 and Matthew 25:34-40.** God so identifies with the poor, so that what we do to the poor, we do unto God. God is for the poor and works through the poor. If we love God, we will love the things he loves. If we ignore the poor, we cannot say we know God or love God.

**Luke 2:7.** Jesus was born into a poor family. He was born in a feeding trough. When his parents offered sacrifices at the temple, they gave pigeons, which is the sacrifice provision for the poor. All his life, Jesus was poor and he died with his clothes as his only possession. What does that tell us that Jesus came as a poor man? That God loves the poor and identifies with the poor.