

God, the Poor and Us: Forty Biblical Reminders

On the fortieth anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, we honor his work by meditating on forty biblical texts that highlight God's special love for poor people. This theme appears throughout the Scriptures in every period and every literary genre. These selected texts are only a tiny sampling of the hundreds and hundreds of scriptural texts that show that God demands that God's people seek justice for the poor.

These texts could be used as a resource for personal Lenten devotions this year, or for a class on the issue of poverty, or perhaps you will think of other ways to use them.

(These texts are taken from Ronald J. Sider, *For They Shall Be Fed: Scripture Readings and Prayers for a Just World* [Dallas: Word, 1997] and the translation is the New Century Version.)

An Overview

1. "Being kind to the poor is like lending to the LORD; he will reward you for what you have done," Pr 19:17.
2. "Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person," 1 Jn 3:17.
3. "God, give the king your good judgment...He will help the poor when they cry out and will save the needy when no one else will help," Ps 72:1, 12.
4. "For the many crimes of Israel, I will punish them. For silver, they sell people who have done nothing wrong; they sell the poor to buy a pair of sandals. They walk on poor people as if they were dirt," Am 2:6-7.
5. "The Lord has put his Spirit in me, because he has appointed me to tell the Good News to the poor. He has sent me to tell the captives they are free and to tell the blind that they can see again," Lk 4:18.

Why We Care

6. "This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life through him...Dear friends, if God loved us that much we also should love each other," 1 Jn 4:9, 11.
7. "You know that Christ was rich, but for you he became poor so that by his becoming poor you might become rich," 2 Cor 8:9.
8. "Do not be unfair to a foreigner or an orphan. Don't take a widow's coat to make sure she pays you back. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and the LORD your God saved you from there. That is why I am commanding you to do this," Deut 24:17-18.

God Does Justice

9. "I know the LORD will get justice for the poor and will defend the needy in court," Ps. 140:12.
10. "He gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free...The Lord protects the foreigners. He defends the orphans and widows," Ps 146:7, 9.

11. "Here is my servant, the one I support...and he will bring justice to all nations," Is 42:1.
12. "The LORD says, 'I completely hate your feasts. I cannot stand your religious meetings...But let justice flow like a river, and let goodness flow like a stream that never stops,'" Am 5:21, 24.
13. "The LORD hates dishonest scales, but he is pleased with honest weights," Pr 11:1.
14. "The LORD All-Powerful says, 'Then I will come to you and judge you. I will be quick to testify against those who take part in evil magic, adultery, and lying under oath, those who cheat workers of their pay and who cheat widows and orphans, those who are unfair to foreigners, and those who do not respect me,'" Mal 3:5.

God Hates Injustice

15. "The LORD takes his place in court and stands to judge the people... Your houses are full of what you took from the poor. What gives you the right to crush my people and grind the faces of the poor into the dirt?" Is 3:13-15.
16. "'There are wicked men among my people. Like those who make nets for catching birds, they set their traps to catch people...They have become rich and powerful. They have grown big and fat. There is no end to the evil things they do. They won't plead the case of the orphan or help the poor be judged fairly. Shouldn't I punish the people of Judah for doing these things?' says the LORD," Jer 5:26-29.
17. "Listen to me, you who walk on helpless people, you who are trying to destroy the poor people of this country, saying,... 'We can charge them more and give them less, and we can change the scales to cheat the people. We will buy poor people for silver, and needy people for the price of a pair of sandals' ... The LORD has sworn... 'I will never forget everything that these people did,'" Am 8:4-7.
18. "You rich people, listen! Cry and be very sad because of the troubles that are coming to you...The pay you did not give the workers who mowed your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the workers have been heard by the Lord All-Powerful. Your life on earth was full of rich living and pleasing yourselves with everything you wanted," Js 5:1-5.
19. "This was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were proud and had plenty of food and lived in great comfort, but she did not help the poor and needy...So I got rid of them when I saw what they did," Ez 16:49-50.
20. "How terrible it will be for those who make unfair laws, and those who write laws that make life hard for people. They are not fair to the poor, and they rob my people of their rights. They allow people to steal from widows and to take from orphans what really belongs to them," Is 10:1-2.

Our Response

21. "Whoever mistreats the poor insults their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God," Pr 14:31.

22. "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of all those who have nothing. Speak up and judge fairly, and defend the rights of the poor and needy," Pr 31:8-9.
23. "I will tell you the kind of special day I want:...Share your food with the hungry and bring poor, homeless people into your own homes. When you see someone who has no clothes, give him yours," Is 58:6-7.
24. "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Get for yourselves purses that will not wear out, the treasure in heaven that never runs out, where thieves can't steal and moths can't destroy. Your heart will be where your treasure is," Lk 12:33-34.
25. "The people asked John, 'Then what should we do?' John answered, 'If you have two shirts, share with the person who does not have one. If you have food, share that also,'" Lk 3:10-11.

The Cost of Neglect

26. "Then the King will say to those on his left, 'Go away from me. You will be punished. Go into the fire that burns forever that was prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink. I was alone and away from home, and you did not invite me into your house. I was without clothes, and you gave me nothing to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you did not care for me,'" Mt 25:41-43.
27. "He has brought down rulers from their thrones and raised up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with nothing," Lk 1:52-53.
28. "Don't continue bringing me worthless sacrifices!...When you raise your arms to me in prayer, I will refuse to look at you...Seek justice...Help the orphans. Stand up for the rights of widows," Is 1:13, 15, 17.
29. "They cheat widows and steal their houses and then try to make themselves look good by saying long prayers. They will receive a greater punishment," Lk 20:47.
30. "Those who want to become rich bring temptation to themselves and are caught in a trap. They want many foolish and harmful things that ruin and destroy people. The love of money causes all kinds of evil. Some people have left the faith," 1 Tim 6:9-10.
31. "Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, then go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor. If you do this, you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.' But when the young man heard this, he left sorrowfully, because he was rich. Then Jesus said to his followers, 'I tell you the truth, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Yes, I tell you that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God,'" Mt 19:21-24.
32. "Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning," Js 4:17.

Good Models

33. "Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people. They gave only what they did not need. This woman is very poor, but she gave all she had to live on,'" Mk 12:43-44.

34. "What you have can help others who are in need. Then later, when they have plenty, they can help you when you are in need, and all will be equal. As it is written in the Scriptures, 'The person who gathered more did not have too much, nor did the person who gathered less have too little'" 2 Cor 8:14-15.
35. "When you are gathering your harvest in the field and leave behind a bundle of grain, don't go back and get it. Leave it there for foreigners, orphans, and widows so that the LORD your God can bless everything you do," Deut 24:19.
36. "It is better to be poor and honest than to be foolish and tell lies," Pr 19:1.
37. "You must not be unfair to a poor person when he is in court," Ex 23:6.
38. "'Does having a lot of cedar in your house make you a great king? Your father was satisfied to have food and drink. He did what was right and fair, so everything went well for him. He helped those who were poor and needy, so everything went well for him. This is what it means to know God,' says the LORD," Jer 22:15-16.

Our Hope

39. "In the last days...many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD...so that he can teach us his ways...Everyone will sit under his own vine and fig tree, and no one will make them afraid,'" Micah 4:1-2, 4.
40. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Now God's presence is with people, and he will live with them, and they will be his people...He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain, because all the old ways are gone.' The One who was sitting on the throne said, 'Look! I am making everything new!'" Rev 21:1, 3-5.