

Labor & the Poor Connections

I. Labor in America.

Labor Day is a federal holiday in the United States that honors the American labor movement and workers' contributions to the country's development. It was first celebrated on the first Monday of September 1882 by NYC workers who fought for better working conditions (Child Labor, 12 hrs/day; 6 days/week; crowded and poorly ventilated spaces). In 1886, the AFL organized a strike with over 300k workers to advocate an 8hr/day instead of 16hr/day. In 1925, a black man named A. Phillip Randolph formed the first black labor union called, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

Yet today, society labels some workers as essential but afterwards they are considered expendable.

Workers had to fight (some died) to get benefits like the 8 hours workday, 5-day workweek, holiday and sick pay, and minimum wage rates.

Unions used to represent more than 30% of the labor force but today it's less than 12% due mainly to big businesses and government opposition. Yet many non-union businesses have been influenced by union should be workers benefits.

II. The Poor in America.

According to the federal government, there are nearly 40 million Americans (11.5%) who are poor today. The OPM (official poverty measure) for a family's budget was based on three times what a family spent on food back in the 1960s. Yet over 60% of Americans today live paycheck to paycheck. A more accurate picture of poverty is if people had an unexpected \$500 emergency in a month there would be over 125 million (38.5%) that would not be able to meet their basic monthly expenses.

Despite consistent gains over the past decades in the GDP and stock market indices, real wealth for most Americans has steadily declined over the past five decades. In 2016 there was not a **single county** in the USA where a minimum wage person working full time could afford to rent a simple two-bedroom apartment. Maybe we need to raise the minimum wage to a living wage.

III. The Invisible in America.

A Watchman is charged with communicating what he sees. What he sees is typically what others don't see. Jesus in Matthew 25 tells the story of people who didn't see Him.

Because of many lies and negative information, we often don't see the impoverished.

We don't see that there are millions of people working **full-time** jobs every day who are poor. A person making \$15k/yr. = \$1256/mo. is not considered to be in poverty. Yet how do they make ends meet? (rent \$800+/mo; utilities \$150+/mo; food \$200+/mo; transportation \$300+/mo; insurance \$100+/mo; health care \$150+/mo; miscellaneous \$? /mo. Many people are working multiple jobs just to make ends meet.

We don't see that poor people are overwhelmingly **white**. The racist images of Black mothers on welfare have dominated the images of Americans and are not only demeaning to Black people but obscuring the poverty of 60 million white people.

We don't see women doing the same jobs as men and yet making less than 80% of what a man makes.

IV. Wealth in America.

Resources & wealth have not been the problem in America for she is the largest economy in the world. The problem in America has always been about wealth distribution (unfair competition, collusion, accessibility, redlining, & etc. issues). Wealth **inequality** in America has rarely been greater.

In the mid 1970's less than 20% of the public had college degrees. OSU tuition costs \$801/yr. for full-time schooling. The minimum wage was \$1.65/hr. & if you worked 11 weeks in the summer you could earn \$726 (90%). Yet the top 1% owned **10%** of the nation's wealth.

Today over 35% of the public have college degrees. OSU tuition costs > \$12,000/yr. for full-time schooling (15x). The minimum wage is \$10.10/hr. & if you worked 11 weeks in the summer you could earn \$4444 (37%). Yet the top 1% today owned > **50%** of the nation's wealth.

Remember in Nazi Germany everything Hitler did was legal but certainly not moral.

People using bankruptcy protection laws multiple times might be legal, but it is not moral to not pay your debtors.

V. What does the Bible say regarding the poor & systems that oppress the poor?

God never blames the group of poor people for being poor, but God does **blame** systems that oppress the poor.

God's Theocracy had a **different** economy than what we have in America today.

Deuteronomy 15:1-5 | NASB ¹ “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts. ² “This is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed. ³ “From a foreigner you may exact it, but your hand shall release whatever of yours is with your brother. ⁴ “However, there will be no poor among you, since the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, ⁵ if only you listen obediently to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 | NASB ⁷ “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; ⁸ but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.

Deuteronomy 15:11 | NASB ¹¹ “For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore, I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.

God calls for Prophets to hold systems accountable.

Isaiah 3:13-15 | NASB ¹³ The Lord arises to contend, And stands to judge the people.¹⁴ The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people, “It is you who have devoured the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses.¹⁵ “What do you mean by crushing My people And grinding the face of the poor?” Declares the Lord God of hosts.

Jeremiah 5:27c-28 | NASB Like a cage full of birds, So their houses are full of deceit; Therefore they have become great and rich. ²⁸ ‘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.

Ezekiel 16:49-50 | NASB ⁴⁹ “Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ “Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it.

Amos 5:11c-12 | NASB ^{11c}Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor And exact a tribute of grain from them, Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, Yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine.¹² For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, You who distress the righteous and accept bribes And turn aside the poor in the gate.

James 2:4-6 | NASB ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

Yet a Pew Research Center study of almost **50,000** sermons found that neither the words “poverty” nor “poor” register as commonly used in America’s pulpits.

VI. What does Jesus Christ have to say concerning the poor and wealth?

Luke 4:18c-19 | NASB “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed,¹⁹ To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

Matthew 5:42-47 | NASB ⁴² “Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. ⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ “If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Matthew 6:19-21 | NASB ¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

VII. The American economy.

We must build our economy on **moral** foundations.

If you want to build any new building, you will have to clear the site & start excavation for new foundations. Then you commence the structure, exterior closure, interiors, & so on.

If you want to move a building, you don’t lift it from the top or you will tear off the roof structure. If you lift it from the middle, you will tear the building apart. You must lift it from the bottom. You insert steel beams underneath the foundations, and you jack the building up to move it.

I submit it is the same with our national economy. We must build from the foundation bottom upwards and not from the top down. Trickle-down economics doesn’t work in the long run.

The current church in America by itself does not have all the resources to care for the poor today. (housing, healthcare, insurance, food, & living expenses). Yet in Nehemiah’s time, the resource that God used was the **National Government**.

Without support from family and friends, many of the working poor would be unhoused and living in poverty. Many poor people have had tragic experiences such as divorce, healthcare issues, and extreme medical costs.

VIII. What is our response to be?

Our responsibility is to Love the poor.

We need to stop doing what we have been doing and start doing the following things.

- A. Stop blaming the poor for their condition and start having more compassion for them.
- B. We need to see (recognize) them, show them more dignity, and respect them.
- C. We need to give the poor more resources when we are able.
- D. We need to speak blessings to the poor and break curses over them.
- E. We need to defend the poor against unfair treatment when we can.
- F. We need to listen to them and pray for them more.
- G. We need to do justice on behalf of the poor.
- H. We need to VOTE for candidates that will help the poor.

May the Lord Jesus Christ richly bless you on your journey of connections!

*Rhema Christian Center
Minister J. "Skip" Jones
Saturday & Sunday, August 31 & September 1, 2024
9:30 a.m.*