

## **Job 5:8-16; 1 Tim 2:1**

A few weeks ago I was lucky enough to attend a World Vision church leader's seminar on helping the poor. Tim Costello, head of WV Australia, introduced us to Jayakumar Christian, head of WV India. I'll be talking about some of what they shared later. At the end of the talking-bit there was the mingle-bit, and I got to talk to Jayakumar. At the end of our conversation he asked me if I would be willing to do something for him and for WV, India. Now, when you really think about it, what on earth could I do for him? Name any major problem in this world and India has it: *poverty; extreme poverty; not enough infrastructure; poor health system; Hinduism (karma, you get what you deserve); the caste system; religious extremists of all sorts.* And Jayakumar is one of the most godly people I have ever met. He was humble, generous, compassionate, Jesus seemed to shine from every pore, this is a man who walks with God. But I said 'sure, whatever I can.' Of all the things that he could have asked me to help with multiple challenges he is facing, (like giving more, buying fair trade, helping a particular project, or lobbying the government), he asked if I could pray for him, his work and his country.

- I often think that we, with all our 'blessings' are worse off than our Christian brothers and sisters who live in the Majority World. If we don't have a job then the government supports us, so we can get enough to eat, a roof over our heads; if we get sick, we have a health system, that may not be perfect, but is a million times better than some countries (eg, do not go to a hospital in Cambodia unless you are tired of life); we have a police force and a legal system who will try to get everyone justice, also not perfect, but with little or no corruption; we have a government who tries to work for the good of the people, with politicians who are not *solely* devoted to feathering their own nests; we have the right to education, in fact kids are forced to school; we also have freedom of religion; freedom of *speech*; freedom to be who we want to be. For every problem, there is a physical solution.

- But if you live in a country like India where there is no way out of the caste system for example, and no earthly solution to your problems, when God really is the only answer, then the value and the power of prayer becomes very clear. When we pray, when we ask God to hear our prayers we are acknowledging that He is concerned with His creation, that He is an active part of our world today, and that He has the ability and the will to answer our prayers.

- Jeff has spoken on prayer twice in the last couple of months, so I don't need to repeat all he told us about the value of prayer, 'cause I know we were all listening and we have all remembered what he told us. But I will look at a couple of lines of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus taught us to pray and He included praying for our daily bread and for God's will to be done here on earth as it is in Heaven.

(This next bit mostly comes directly from BWA, 'cause they put it in a way I could not improve).

- Obviously there is much in the Lord's Prayer that we would pray for everybody, such as belief in Christ. But there are also dimensions to help identify prayer points that apply more particularly to the poor. Jesus' audience was made up largely of peasant farmers living under an oppressive foreign regime and they would have been very aware of the situations and circumstances that could threaten their "daily bread".

Jesus used an illustration in Matt 7 of troubles that *will* come.

*Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like the person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house it will collapse with a mighty crash.*

No one could dispute that troubles will come, and some of these included:

- 1.** Environmental factors such as drought and storm
- 2.** Sickness due to poor nutrition, lack of clean water, poor medical care
- 3.** Theft and violence
- 4.** Oppression and Injustice
  - an unjust economic order that saw the elite impose a heavy tax burden on peasant farmers
  - foreign forces occupying the city and commanding crops and wealth - overlords
  - corrupt officials that cheated people out of their wealth (Zaccheus' reference to cheating people in Luke 19.8. Although he used the word 'if' there really was no doubt about it. It was one reason why tax collectors were hated).
  - unjust decisions by the court (eg the persistent widow in Luke 18) that deprived them of their land and livelihood (eg Proverbs 13.23 and 22.22)
- 5.** Indifference - the rich were to share their abundance with the poor, but regularly failed to do so, leaving people trapped in poverty (eg the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16.19-31)

These examples were used throughout the Bible because people would recognise them and understand them, these injustices were a part of life. Is there much difference in our world today?

To pray for the poor then is to pray that the poor will be able to meet their daily needs, and for the just, equitable and compassionate social and economic order that enables this to occur.

So what should we pray for:

1. Access to the financial and infrastructure resources necessary to cope with environmental challenges and to recover from environmental disaster
2. Access to clean water, sanitation, nutritious food and decent housing
3. Community formation, so that strong social bonds are formed and communities become safe places to live
4. An end to oppression and injustice, including the removal or repentance of those who act oppressively, and the creation of just economic and social institutions
5. Generosity on the part of the wealthy.

Job 5:8-9 says *"If I were you I would go to God and present my case to Him. He does great things too marvellous to understand. He performs countless miracles."*

If we look at the list of things that are needed for a fair and equitable world, then we are going to need some pretty big miracles. In fact, it will only be possible when God's kingdom is fully here on earth, when things are done on earth as they are in heaven. The passage from Job continues – "He gives prosperity to the poor and protects those who suffer. ... He rescues the poor from the cutting words of the strong, and rescues them from the clutches of the powerful." God *will* do these things because of how much He loves His people, His creation. "And so at last the poor have hope." God is their only hope (and ours as well). And so we pray to Him, we join our prayers with those from all over the world for God's kingdom to come.

**Summary:** Over the past few weeks we have been exploring how we, as Christians, need to be answering God's call to help the poor; listening carefully to God, consuming ethically, speaking out courageously, giving generously and praying faithfully. I'd like to summarise briefly by telling you some of the things I learnt at the WV seminar.

- One of the biggies - sometimes we believe that our wealth is God-given and that we will be blessed if we help the poor, and that is very Hindu way to think!!!!
- Another biggie - firstly the Church needs to understand poverty and then secondly to formulate our response to it.
- Poverty is not just about statistics, it's about suffering people. Statistics don't bleed. So we need to reach out to people, to become engaged with our world. If we don't understand poverty, we don't understand 'powerlessness' and the effect this has on the lives of billions of people.
- Poverty is a result of broken relationships: often there is a tendency of the powerful to play God in the lives of the powerless. The powerful crush the hopes and dreams of the poor, using both their resources, and religion, for people are afraid to challenge 'religion'. The media is powerful as

it sets boundaries of what can be achieved and what shouldn't be attempted. And education is also defined by the powerful. 'A is for apple', 'S is for snow' even if the children have never seen an apple or snow. All this results in the powerlessness of the poor.

- Poverty is also a result of marred identity, so it more than just restoring justice. People are often considered 'poor' because of their identity, the family they were born into, so the world tells them they are good for nothing. But we are here to remind them of the God who created them and who has not forgotten them. They, too, are created in the image of God.
- Sometimes we become hung up on the terminology of 'mission', like 'development' and 'evangelism', which one do we do first or primarily, but the words used do not matter out in the field. We are there to help the poor because this is a fundamental issue to our faith. Our dependence must be on God to do what is needed, our lives must be so godly that they want to be a Christian, no matter what 'work' we do, or what we call it.

**Conclusion:** The church is not the answer to mission – we are here to raise uncomfortable questions – we are here to challenge the status quo, just as Jesus did. For example when He healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath recorded in Matt 12, Mark 3 and Luke 6.

SO we listen to God, we consume ethically, we speak courageously, we give generously, and we pray faithfully. But our main task is Kingdom ministry, to communicate that power belongs to God. The church is a signpost to the truth of Christ – that only Jesus can open the door to real life, and that life is for everyone.