

Sermon Series: Transforming Society
Sermon Topic: Partnering the Poor by Mr Joseph Chean
Sermon Text: Mathew 25: 35 – 40

A Wider Definition of Poverty

*Poverty is not just a lack of cash. Poverty is not always financial in nature. There is also emotional, mental and social poverty. The lack of options or opportunities can also lead people to poverty.

The Church needs to embrace the poor. But there is a problem:

- The church community mostly comprises of the middle and upper income.
- The poor and marginalized is not featured in our radar. Look around, are they in our church?
- Our schedule is tightly packed, highly driven with much activities. Such lifestyle leaves us with no more room to be inconvenience for the poor.
- Neither do we go down intentionally to the level of the broken and the needy.
- When we help the poor, we tend to focus on immediate results to move the person out of poverty and into the kingdom of God.
 - Too anxious for such results short circuits ministry to the poor .
 - To keep giving them stuff will only cause them to take the blessing but return to their old ways.

The Church can do better:

- Partnering the poor is a 2 way responsibility.
- Help them with short term needs but also teach and empower them to make right choices for long term goals.
 - **Aid and Development:**
 - **Aid** – to offer help, to be generous
 - **Development** – To transform, to bring change in mindset
- Difference between helping the poor and partnering the poor
 - Helping the poor is to give and give
 - Partnering the poor is to pull the poor into a place to take ownership

The Church needs to act justly and love mercy:

- **Act justly**
 - Justice is fairness or reasonableness, especially in the way people are treated or decisions are made for them.
 - Biggest problem of the church helping the poor is that the church decides what the poor needs.
 - Example: we always pack food for them and most of the food can only last 3-4 hours but they only get to eat the food much later when it has turned bad. But they will still eat and get stomach pain, but they will not tell you these problems. Until one day the poor shared that we do not ask them

what do they need, we just decide for them. Some of the things also become a liability.

- Learn to identify what the poor and marginalised need. Begin by listening. Connect heart to heart.
 - The poor are not the clients of the church. Loving the poor is not a project to be done condescendingly. It should be about relationship. The community of poor and marginalised longs for belonging and friendship.
 - Act justly. Do not assume to know what the poor need. Identify their needs. Act and serve the poor in a manner that does not rob them of the dignity they deserve.
- **Love Mercy**
 - Mercy is compassion, kindness or forgiveness shown, especially to someone who is powerless.
 - **Mercy without justice** degenerates into dependency and entitlement. It preserves the power of the giver over the recipient
 - **Justice without mercy** is cold and impersonal. More interested about rights than relationships.

In summary, serve the poor actively. In doing so, it disciplines us. In serving the poor, we know the mind and heart of God better. In serving the poor, we minister to God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Christmas is about giving a gift to celebrate the birth of our Lord. One of the most common encounter recorded in the gospels is Jesus engaging the broken and poor in the society. For this coming Christmas, what can you or your family or small group do as a gift to celebrate the Lord's birthday?

2. What are some of your thoughts or emotions in regards to the suggestion above?

3. Come before the Lord and consider Matt 25:31-46. Read verse 40 and 45 again and listen to the Lord speaking to you. Why do you think God placed such strong emphasis on serving the poor as worship to Him? Also read Isa 58:6-11 and Prov 3:27-28. Pray with each other and respond to God.

4. God doesn't want us to be kind to the poor as a "project" but a lifestyle. As we transit into 2018, do consider the following:
 - a. Learn about what God says about Poverty from Genesis to Revelation. Go Google.

 - b. Ask God to shape your heart to be like His. Compassion must go beyond projects. It is a characteristic to cultivate in our hearts.

 - c. Ask what are some new actions/behaviour to take on as a response to reflect God's compassion.