

Excerpt from CHAPTER TWO

“The Poor, The Needy, Widows and Orphans”

From *Jesus rode a Donkey: Why the Republicans Don't Have a Corner on Christ*

By Dr. Linda Seger

”The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.”

Luke 4:18–19

This was Jesus’ first mission statement. It is often called the Social Gospel, because it proclaims his intent to move people from captivity and oppression to freedom. This is not only spiritual freedom, but proclaiming the Kingdom of God among us, within the society in which we live, and throughout the earth...

The Command for Compassion:

There is much disagreement about exactly what we, as Christians, should be changing in our nation. The Bible tell us nothing about many of the issues that confront us in contemporary society—whether we should talk to or negotiate with terrorists,... what kind of health care or educational system we should have. But there is one area in which the Bible is absolutely clear—we are to help the poor, the needy, the broken-hearted, the oppressed. The entire Bible, beginning with the stories in Genesis and throughout the Old and New Testament, testifies that those who oppress the poor and the needy are not in God’s good graces.

In Isaiah, God says “Shame on you . . . you who make unjust laws and publish burdensome decrees, depriving the poor of justice, robbing the weakest of my people of their rights, despoiling the widow and plundering the orphan.” (Isaiah 10:1-2) God promised that he would bring justice to them and that He would crush their oppressors. (Psalm 72, Proverbs 29)

While protecting the poor, God warns the rich. In Amos he condemns the rich “for crime after crime of Israel I will grant them no reprieve because they sell the

innocent for silver and the destitute for a pair of shoes. They grind the heads of the poor into the earth and thrust the humble out of their way.”(Amos 2)

The Bible tells us God is a stronghold for the oppressed and he will not desert them. He listens to the laments of the brokenhearted. He fills the starving, and rescues those in chains and misery from hard labor. He gives the hungry a home, where they sow the fields, and blesses them with a bountiful harvest. God provides a refuge for the weak and seeks justice for the poor.(Psalms 9-10, 34, Job 5, Psalms 107, Psalms 132, Jeremiah 2, Isaiah 25).

Throughout the Bible, the words for the “poor” are not neutral ones, but expressions of the suffering and misery they endure. The poor person might be *ebyon*, “the one who desires, the beggar, the one who is lacking something and who awaits it from another,” or *dal*, the “weak one, the frail one,” or *ani*, “the bent-over one, the one laboring under a weight, the one not in possession of his whole strength and vigor, the humiliated one” or *anawy*, “humble before God.” In the New Testament, the word *ptokos* is used, meaning “one who does not have what is necessary to subsist, the wretched one driven into begging.”¹ It is the duty of the rich to help the poor, and the strong to protect and bring justice to the weak.² ...

If there is one command in the Bible that seems absolutely clear from beginning to end, it is to help the poor. It is the greatest litmus test we can apply to any governmental policies.... We, as Christians, are called upon to allow the light of Christ to shine on the sadness that is at the core of the human condition, and to be part of God’s redemptive work on earth...

Footnotes:

1. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, rev. ed. Trans. And edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Egleston (Maryknoll, NY Orbis Books, 1971, 1998), p. 165

2. Willliam Durland, *God or Nations: Radical Theology for the Religious Peace Movement*, Baltimore: Fortkamp Publishing Company, 1989, p. 41-42.

