

“A Journey through the N.T.”—Making Poverty History (2 of 3)

Video: Pastor Stratton

HIV/AIDS Statistics

- Over 1 Million people in the United States are currently living with HIV
- Over 40 Million people around the World are infected with HIV
- Last year over 3 million people died from AIDS
- That’s like 20 747s crashing into the ground every day... of every year.
- That’s like the entire population of Oregon being wiped out... every year.

Globally about 40 million people are infected with HIV. An additional 25 million people have AIDS. AIDS is one of the most deadly killers of the poor, especially in Africa.

In wealthy nations today, people who get AIDS receive expensive anti-retroviral drugs that prolong life for many years and enable people to live a somewhat normal life. But in poor countries, these people just die.

Every day in Africa, 6,000 people die of AIDS. 17 million have already died, leaving their families destitute and alone. 15 million African children have lost one or both parents. It is estimated that by the year 2010 there will be more than 25 million AIDS orphans.

Parents, farmers, teachers and leaders are gone. Whole communities are devastated. In many African communities there are only two groups of people left: the elderly and the children.

Last week I shared with you my encounter with a passage of God’s Word that I had never really seen before. I know I had read it, but somehow my heart and mind were not in a position to really understand the implications of these verses on my life: *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.”* Proverbs 31:8-9 (NLT) At that moment I had to admit that morning that I was not concerned with justice, or the poor or the helpless. Goodness, I didn’t even know anyone that fit in those categories! How could this passage be speaking to me?

But I knew that morning almost two years ago that I didn’t want to be the kind of Christian who skipped past or completely ignored passages of the Bible just because they made me feel uncomfortable!

Last week we began this series called, **“Making Poverty History”** by looking through the OT to take a look at God’s heart for the poor. Today we’re going to look at the NT, and next week we’re going to look at the example left to us from the first few hundred years of the Church.

BUT TODAY, LET’S LOOK AT JESUS AND THE APOSTLES

Jesus did not fit very well into the society of his day.

Jesus lived as an outcast of society. He was born in poverty, spent his first few years as a refugee in a foreign land, at some point he grew up without a father, he lived as a homeless person during his three years of ministry and finally in his death was laid in a borrowed grave.

His first recorded sermon didn’t go over well in his boyhood home: *“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.”*

“He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. ‘The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!’” Luke 4:16-21 (NLT) They tried to kill him after that sermon!

As Jesus’ ministry was hitting its full steam, John the Baptist sent a few of his disciples to check up on Jesus. *“Jesus told them, ‘Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.’”* Matthew 11:4-5 (NLT) Jesus was living the Bible!

The world in Jesus’ day consisted in the “haves” and the “have-nots.” The “have-nots” were completely disregarded and even shunned by the religious people. But not Jesus! Jesus reached out for and accepted the least, the last, and the lost—and those people flocked to Jesus.

A popular expression of Jesus’ day was: *“Four are compared with a dead man: the lame, the blind, the leper, and the childless.”* But God has always had a great concern for the sick, the poor, the foreigners in our lands, the orphans, and the widows.

“Large crowds followed Jesus as he came down the mountainside. Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached him and knelt before him. ‘Lord,’ the man said, ‘if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean.’”

“Jesus reached out and touched him. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be healed!’ And instantly the leprosy disappeared.” Matthew 8:1-3 (NLT)

This isn’t just how Jesus lived, it’s what he modeled and what he instilled in his disciples.

“One day Jesus called together his twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to cast out demons and to heal all diseases. Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.”

“So they began their circuit of the villages, preaching the Good News and healing the sick.” Luke 9:1-2, 6 (NLT) Do you see the connection between the “Good Works” and the “Good News?” It’s not one or the other, it’s both, working together to open hearts and minds to God.

Far from shunning the social outcasts, Jesus opened himself to them and challenged others to do the same. Look at this amazing challenge Jesus offers: *“Then he turned to his host. ‘When you put on a luncheon or a banquet,’ he said, ‘don’t invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will invite you back, and that will be your only reward. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then at the resurrection of the righteous, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you.’”* Luke 14:12-14 (NLT) In the Eastern culture of Jesus’ day to invite someone to a meal is an honor. It is an offer of friendship, an expression of trust, and a symbol of peace—sharing the table meant sharing your life.

Jesus offered this stern warning to show that how we treat others is how we’re treating God:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’

“Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

“And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’” Matthew 25:34-40 (NLT)

The first Church got it! They lived this mindset out in amazing ways: *“All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s great blessing was upon them all. There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.”* Acts 4:32-35 (NLT) A bit later Peter is sharing this message with a Gentile:

“This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” Acts 10:36-38 (NLT)

There again, we see the connection between “Good Works” and “Good News.” It’s both!

“In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers. They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews. Their only suggestion was that we keep on helping the poor, which I have always been eager to do.” Galatians 2:9-10 (NLT) Are you sharing your “Good Works” and “Good News?” It’s both...in abundance!

“Yes,” some of you are thinking, *“But can you speak it to me in a simple way?”* O.K.!!!

“Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.” James 1:27 (NLT) Or later where James says, *“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, ‘Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well’—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?”*

“So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.” James 2:14-17 (NLT) How about John’s simple and yet very blunt words: *“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?”*

“Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.” 1 John 3:16-18 (NLT)

As we said last week, what we are called to do is to **Making the Intangible God Tangible!**

“You see, we don’t go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let there be light in the darkness,’ has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

“We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.” 2 Corinthians 4:5-7 (NLT) We hold God within the fragile clay jars of our bodies—in our words and in our actions. We have the light of God living within us and shining out for all to see.

Jesus said to *“let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”*

SO WHAT ARE WE GOING TO BE DOING ABOUT IT? (*Putting your faith into action*)

We are his witnesses: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* Acts 1:8 (NLT)

The Sunrise Four “H” Initiative: Both our “Good Works” and our “Good News.”

–*Jerusalem* (Hunger)

–*Judea* (Homelessness)

–*Samaria* (Hispanics)

–*Ends of the Earth* (HIV/AIDS)

Next week’s ministry fair: 12 Sunrise Examples

God has a heart for the poor, the marginalized, the outcasts of society. But do you? What would it take in your life to begin to prioritize the poor, and the orphans, and those with AIDS?

You never look eyes with some for whom Jesus didn’t die. Rich or poor. Hungry or well fed.

MY JESUS By Todd Agnew

This week may you ask this dangerous question: Is everything I have who I am? Or have I been given these resources by God so that I can be a blessing to others?