

God's Heart for the Poor 10/11/2009

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How are you all doing tonight? Well, in case you forgot that you live in Minnesota, Mother Nature is here to remind you. In light of all that nice weather, now it's payback time. The law of Karma on weather is getting even, so burr. Woke up this morning and looked out the window, saw that white stuff, and I went "No." Here we are. Hey, another six months and it will be over with, so just hunker down.

Well, I really encourage you to think about that mentoring program that we have. The best education, the best life skills come one-on-one and that's what the kingdom is all about, so really take that seriously. Also, that budgeting on the poverty line simulation thing is really, for some, going to be an eye-opening exercise. Now, some of you are already budgeting on that, I imagine, but if you're not, it's really good to enter into what it is to live at that level. So I encourage you to sign up for that. I have my winter mug here as is appropriate. See the little Christmas tree there? So I'm getting into the season. Also, my wife insists that someone gave me a shot of testosterone this last week because I've been watching sports. I'm a man's man now. Watched the Packers. That was great. And watched the Twins win that final game. That was great. The last two nights have not been so great, so we are going to pray a curse upon the Yankees starting right now. I've never liked them. I'm sorry. They have unsurpassable worth, but they just buy their way to victory. There ought to be a law against that.

Okay. Focus now. We're talking about Compassion by Command. This is our second in the series. This message is entitled "God's Heart for the Poor." It could be subtitled "Know Who Your Real Enemy Is," because, as I said before, the titles and the contents don't always match because the titles were given a long time ago. We, last week, looked at Micah chapter six, verse eight, where the author says, "What does the Lord require of you but this one thing, that is to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. That's what the Lord requires."

As I sort of anticipated, I got a little push back from a few folks who were just a little concerned about the word "require" there, because they thought that to say that God requires this of us makes it sound as if I may be falling into what sometimes is called works righteousness or works salvation, the idea that there are some things that are required of us to be saved. And so what they heard was the way we get saved is by acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God, and that seems to be contrary to the New Testament teaching, certainly contrary to the way most conservative Evangelical Christians have interpreted the New Testament, because there it seems the Bible is saying we're saved completely by grace apart from works. The classic text on this is Ephesians chapter two, and I just want to start by diving into this. This is a very important point, I think very frequently misunderstood point. Ephesians chapter 2 where Paul

says this: He says, "For it is by grace that you've been saved through faith." It's by grace, and it's through faith. That's how you're saved. "And this is not of yourselves, it is a gift of God." Grace is a gift. Salvation is a gift. "Not by works, so that no one can boast." It's a gift. It is grace. Receive it just by putting your trust in Christ absolutely. That's why no one can boast or feel proud of holding the right beliefs or of being on the inside club or being saved or anything of the sort. It's not by works so that no one can boast. But, see, it's sort of the standard, at least modern western Evangelical interpretation of that verse, that's taken to mean if I believe, if I believe intellectually that Jesus Christ is Lord and died for my sins, well, then I escape hell. That's how they interpret being saved by grace through faith. If I just believe in Jesus, then I'm rescued from hell and maybe there's some things I should do, that would be nice to do, good to do, I'm supposed to do, but it's not essential for salvation. It's not part of the bottom line. It won't disqualify me from hell, and so I might get around that or not; but, fortunately, I know that I'm saved whether there are any of those nice works there or not.

Kevin Callaghan was our care pastor here, had a teaching that I went to last Saturday night at this one place, and he was talking about this theology, and he used a great analogy. He said this theology is kind of like -- he called it a Titanic theology. You're on the Titanic, and it's sinking, and the important thing when the Titanic is sinking is that you've got to grab a lifeboat, you've got to get one of those rafts. And so this is, kind of, how salvation is thought about here in Western culture. It's everyone out for themselves. It's kind of save-your-own-butt theology. I got to get me a lifeboat. I got to get in the lifeboat, the lifeboat of Jesus Christ. Hallelujah. God gives it to me by grace. I'm going to get in that lifeboat, try to get some other people in that lifeboat, but the Titanic itself is going to sink. And, if you think about it, that theology, that way of, kind of, construing things is, really, quite profoundly self centered. I'm out for me. I want to save my own behind. It is very individualistic. It's about me getting in that lifeboat and, of course, because I love certain people I'll try to get them in the lifeboat, as well. And the Titanic itself, well, that's just, kind of, going down the tubes so there's not much concern about that. It's very self centered, very individualistic. It's also very convenient because you could come to the conclusion that, if the Titanic is sinking, and that's kind of the earth and the whole creation thing, then it really doesn't matter what we do with the earth and the whole creation thing. I mean, you know, if I'm assured of a lifeboat, then I can wait until the very end to get in that lifeboat. And if I'm in first class and you're in last class, well, then who cares because this whole thing is sinking. So I'm not going to feel very much conviction of the fact that I'm in first class eating my caviar while you're down there in last class in the bottom of the boat, you know, working like slaves keeping the engine running or something of the sort. No, the Titanic is sinking. The important thing is that everyone finds their lifeboat. So it's very convenient because now I can enjoy my life here and all of its extra benefits that I happen to be blessed with and don't have to feel much conviction about the poor folks as long as we offer them the lifeboat, and anything beyond that comes across as work salvation. Now, here's the thing. That

interpretation, that way of construing salvation by grace through faith, there's a number of problems with it. But the main one is it ignores the next verse. It ignores the next verse. Look what happens when you read it in context. "For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith." Hallelujah. "And this is not of yourselves, it's a gift of God." Hallelujah. "Not by works, so that no one can boast." Hallelujah. But now look at: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Kind of refrains things a little bit. The word "for" there, "gar" in Greek, is given, sort of, the reason why the two previous verses were saying what they said. The reason why we're saved by grace through faith so no one can boast is because we are God's handiwork, and we're created for good works. We're not saved by works but we are saved for works. The reason why we're saved is to do the works that we were created to do. And then God says there, he says that the works he prepared in advance. Now, what he's getting at there is this: From the start, from the foundation, in advance, this was the plan that we were going to be God's handiwork, that we were going to be made in the image of God. This was the plan from the start, and we are, now, our job description was to receive his fullness of life and then to manifest that fullness of life back to God, to each other, to the animal kingdom and to the earth. Now, we fell, and we sinned, and we came into the principalities and the powers which had incapacitated our ability to do that. But the reason why we're saved, the reason why Jesus Christ came down and saves us by grace through faith so that no one can boast is so that now we can recover that original design and begin to live out what it means to be God's handiwork made in the image of God, begin to live life the way God wanted us to live life. He saved us for these good works. The good works are about acting justly. The good works are about showing compassion and showing mercy. The good works are about walking humbly with our God. We're not saved by doing those things, but we're saved in order to do those things. You can't separate the two. What it means is that the purpose of salvation is not to grab on to a lifeboat while the Titanic is sinking. The purpose of salvation is to save the Titanic from sinking. God loves the earth. He's never given up on it, this real estate. He's not going to surrender real estate to the enemy. He's promised to make a new heaven and a new earth and salvation includes the whole thing. We're saved in order to be restored as the captains of this ship and start steering the ship the way God wants us to steer this ship. It means that the purpose of salvation is for us to participate in God's fullness of life, to dance with the triune God the way he has always wanted us to dance with him, as to reflect his character to each other and to the animal kingdom and to the earth, to start taking care of this Titanic, if you will; which is why everything is encompassed by the kingdom of God. Everything is encompassed by salvation. It involves everything. It means we're saved to start acting justly, administering his justice and confronting oppression and loving compassion and walking humbly with our God; which, of course, includes as a central piece, given that God 3,000 times in the Bible mentions coming against greed and oppression and siding with the poor, it includes as a central component living justly, acting mercifully. It

includes as a central component living in right relationship with the poor, people from other social and economic states. It means starting to live with equity and starting to live generously. It means living life the way God wants us to live life. That's why we're saved. We don't get saved by doing those things. But, if that fullness of life is there, those works will start to be there.

That's why James said that faith without works is dead. Now, let's ask this question. What keeps us from doing that? Why do we not live that way more? Or, even more fundamentally, we can ask this question: What keeps people in poverty? On that question, there is a very unique kingdom perspective that I want us all to get. The Bible has a unique way of looking at this that is not shared by the broader culture and so important that we get the unique kingdom perspective. In the broader culture, when it comes to thinking about poverty issues and when it comes to thinking about any issues, in the natural way of thinking about things, we look at everything through the grid of our knowledge of good and evil, through the grid of our judgments. The arrogance of thinking that we know things that we really don't know, that's the root sin of the Bible, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So we come at this through our judgments and that's why, invariably, people think on this issue, on poverty and every other issue, that if only we could blame the right people, you know, kind of accuse the right people, well, then we will solve this problem. And there's all these accusations that I said last week. The affluent think that only if those poor folks would just start working more and have less kids out of wedlock and blah, blah, blah, well, then they wouldn't be poor. And the poor look at the wealthy and say if only they wouldn't take up more than their fair share and wouldn't hoard those resources, then the world would be fair. And there's all these accusations. The most fundamental driving sin of the Bible is thinking you can fix the world through accusation, but it only further breaks the world. And, of course, that gets carried over into politics. Everyone is going to fix the world through their political ideals. Yeah, we've got the right ideas and if only those dog-on, stupid other people would not, you know, if they cared about the poor, well, then they would support our plan, and the other folks are saying if only you cared about the poor, then you wouldn't be opposing our plan. And then there's all these accusations about you don't really care for the poor and this fighting back and forth and whatnot, and it goes on and on and on and on. In the meantime, the issue never gets fixed. The world's way of approaching poverty and all other issues always involves an us/them, an us/them sort of polarity. I don't know if you've noticed that or not. You find right in the Bible, Genesis 3, as soon as they fall, as soon as they sin, they start trying to cover their tracks by accusing one other. That's why they're eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It's their accusations. It's their judgments. Us/them. And we're always, of course, the right ones, the good ones who really care. They're always the nasty, evil ones who don't care. And only if we could win and squash them, well, then the world will be a better place, and we'll rid the world of poverty. But, see, according to the Bible, the problem of poverty and most other social problems are much deeper than any political program's ever going to fix. In fact, they're deeper

than any human ingenuity is going to fix. And I'm not trying to say that political programs are completely unimportant, but I am here to tell you that they can, even the best, even the brightest, even the wisest, which are, of course, mine are, probably, only going to put a dent in the problem, which is something, but it's not going to rid the world of this problem.

In fact, I just read this two weeks ago, in the last 50 years where we've had so much thinking about domestic poverty and the issues that create it and global poverty and there's been so much thinking and so much, you know, our best intellects are applied to this. In those 50 years, the gulf between the affluent who have their needs met and the poorest who don't, about 25 percent of the population, has grown fourfold. In America, it's grown like threefold in the last 25 years, the gulf between the rich and the poor. We're not fixing the problem. The problem is, actually, getting worse, which ought to, at least, tip God's people off that maybe the problem is deeper than what even the wisest of ideas can fix. The Bible teaches that the problem of poverty and every other social problem is not, and here's the unique kingdom perspective, is not, primarily, a problem with people. People make choices, and they're morally responsible, and they've got, you know, they have to own up to that, but the fundamental problem is not people, smart people, dumb people, wise people, uncaring people. The problem, most fundamentally, is that this world is oppressed. We're under the influence of principalities and powers that we ourselves invited in into this world back in the Adam and Eve days, and we are oppressed. There's something bigger than ourselves that is at work here. It says this in Ephesians chapter six. Here's what Paul says, incredibly important verse. "For our struggle," this would include the struggle about poverty and responsibility with wealth, "the struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." That's where our real struggle is. This world, as it now is, is under the influence of forces of evil that hold us in bondage and hold all of creation, to some degree, in bondage, and we are still morally responsible agents, we need to own up to what we do. It doesn't work to say the devil made me do it because he didn't. Neither God nor the devil takes away your free will, but we are under the influence of evil and that, to a large degree, holds us in bondage and it's not just our own individual hearts that is in bondage to evil, but there are systematic structural aspects of society as a whole that are under these principalities and powers, and one of the things these principalities and powers do is they play us off against one another by our eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and we make each other the problem which deflects us from them being the problem, so we don't work together to fight them, we end up fighting one another, and they laugh all the way to the bank.

It's a little bit like this. When I was in eighth grade, I had a good friend named Rocky. I don't even know if that was his real name or if that is just what we called him. It was before the Rocky series. His name was Rocky, and he and I were good friends. We got in a lot of trouble

together. You know, I was a wild eighth grader, he was a wild eighth grader, so we were good buddies. But, at some point, we started just like locking horns. We started fighting one another. I'm not quite even sure why. I think it started with a food fight. I remember we had this huge food fight in the cafeteria. And we were always flicking stuff at one another, but something happened where it all of a sudden became this, kind of, I have to one up you, and people start looking, watching. And then, you know, someone had to, you know, end this thing with the biggest piece of food thrown, and it just got crazy to the point where he and I were just finding everyone's meal and we're throwing it at one another, and it was no longer fun. It kind of got out of control, and everyone is there egging us on and something happened with that, we got brought into the principal and all sorts of problems, but that was normal. But, after that, we started like digging at each other in the hallway, behind each other's backs, and there was something like -- there's a little animosity in our relationship. We played on the same football team, and we started taking cheap hits at one another, and there, kind of, started to be this aggravation that was there. Some kids noticed it, and this is junior high, this is the jungle, and so they started egging us on. Hey, did you hear what Rocky said about you? Rocky, did you hear what Greg Boyd said about you? And they said, you ought to fight him, and they start pushing us towards the fight. And, at some point at the end of a football practice, I don't know how it happened, we started throwing punches at one another and it turned into an out-and-out brawl. Me and Rocky, we used to be like best friends. And I remember, even while we're pulverizing one another, I'm thinking to myself, I don't want to do this, I like him. But there was this sense of fate or inevitability, we have to do this, like two animals in the cage, this animal fight or something with the crowd around us egging us on, we're both trying to save face. But I really didn't want to do it. It looked like it was about us but, really, it was about the system, this junior high system. The coach came and broke us up, and we ended up going to the principal's office, again. And the principal is saying, what is this, I thought you guys were friends and blah, blah, blah. And, while we were talking to him, we started, kind of, laughing about it. We are friends, what are we doing? This is really dumb. This was really dumb. Why did we do this? And we, in our own little eighth grade ways, came to realize the reason we did it had nothing to do with one another. We could have talked through our issues and we were doing it right then, but it was the system that was pushing us in this direction, and we couldn't fight the system. So we decided there in the principal's office that we were going to be friends and we weren't going to dig at one another, we're going to relate to one another differently and we were together going to fight the system, because we knew that as soon as we walked out of the principal's office there would be kids there saying, hey, Greg really whipped you, you'd better get even or, hey, Rocky really beat you up, you'd better get even. So we agreed to say it was kind of a draw and that we're both tough guys and we both won and we both lost and blah, blah, blah. See, together we can fight the system but we couldn't do it alone. That is, I think, how the powers, the principalities and powers, the forces of evil play us. They play us off against one another

and it is so stupid, if we could just step out of the system and look at it. I'm white and you're black, and all of a sudden there's something in the system that says we're supposed to be suspicious of one another, maybe even blame one another for society's problems, maybe even make one another the enemy. I'm republican, you're democrat or I'm democrat and you're republican, or whatever, and all of a sudden because of that I'm going to suspect that maybe your faith isn't genuine, maybe you don't really care about the poor, maybe you really aren't on board with the Gospel and so on and so on. It's stupid. They play us off against one another. I'm American, you're Iranian and because of that our countries are kind of in conflict so now, all of a sudden, I'm going to look at you -- I maybe don't even know you, but now I'm going to look at you with suspicion because somebody up there says I'm supposed to be suspicious about you. We're being played by the system. In fact, it can be the case that if you're from a country that my country is having problems with, all of a sudden, if I'm of the right age and under the right circumstance, if someone tells me to shoot you, I'll shoot you. Why? I don't know you or anything, but I'm just supposed to do it. In fact, I would argue that war is the quintessential expression of the way the powers play us off one another. Because my boss has a problem with your boss and there's some kind of conflict going on here and because of where I was born and how I was conditioned to think, I'm going to shoot at you and because of where you were born and how you were conditioned to think, you're going to shoot at me and, probably, since we're both 18 to 22 years old, most of the time, we don't have a clue about what's really going on. We don't know why we're killing each other, but this is just what you do. Blaise Pascal said, one of my favorite quotes, he said: "Can anything be stupider than that a man has the right to kill me because he lives on the other side of a river and his ruler has a quarrel with mine, though I have not quarreled with him?" Yeah, that is pretty stupid when you think about it. The powers play us off one another. And the same thing happens when it comes to the rich and the poor and those in the middle, we get played off one another. It starts by the fact that the system is set up unjustly. As we said last week, the system, under the influence of the powers, it arbitrarily privileges some and disadvantages others. Just by virtue of the fact that my ancestors came over here and conquered some people and yada yada yada, by virtue of my gender and by virtue of my skin color and by virtue of my heritage, I've got privileges that others don't have, and by virtue of the fact that you're one of the ones my ancestors conquered, you get to live in a reservation and I get to live in a nice neighborhood wherever I want. See, that already is part of the system. And then the powers come in with the judgments about that, the class judgments. You nasty rich people, you lazy poor people. And that then divides us so we don't work at solving this issue. Rather, we look at each other through suspicion. And the powers further divide us having judgments about how to fix the problem. My ideas are better than your ideas. Your ideas are stupid and if you don't agree with my ideas, then there's something wrong with you. And so now we end up with all these judgments and no one, really, is doing much that fixes the system. Rather, the gulf continues to grow. We're being played by the powers. I really

believe it's time on, this issue and on every issue, that we wake up to the reality of who the real enemy is. Wake up to the reality that we are being played. The forces are using an unjust system to dehumanize everyone, rich and poor. The powers use an unjust system to dehumanize the poor by reducing them to a subhuman level of existence where they live hand to mouth; that's not how humans were supposed to live. Where some live on the street without a home; that's not how humans were supposed to live. Where they live in fear of being evicted from an unjust landlord at any moment; that's not how humans were meant to live. Where they wonder if they have to put their kids in the foster care because they can't afford to feed them; that's not how humans were ever meant to live. The powers and the system dehumanize the poor by reducing them to a system that's beneath human dignity; that's not how humans were meant to live. But the powers also dehumanize, use an unjust system to dehumanize the affluent. And this is what we need to see. Reduce us to a subhuman level of existence by making us, really, reducing us to brainwashed mice who are perpetually on the consumeristic treadmill chasing the proverbial cheese of the American dream; that's not how humans were meant to live. Working so much we don't, really, have quality time with our kids or with our spouse or with our friends or with our missional communities; that's not how humans were meant to live. Under the stress of maintaining all the stuff that we have: The house, the car, the cabin, whatever, all the stress of trying to balance that; that's not how humans were meant to live. We're in bondage to the powers, brainwashed to be perpetually charging things, perpetually chasing after things, perpetually shopping, perpetually thinking we need more; that's not how humans were meant to live. Lacking time even to work, have soul work where we develop ourselves spiritually and as more complete human beings, spending time with our Lord because we're too busy doing other things, chasing the cheese; that's not how humans were meant to live. Robbed of the joy of living a simple life, an extravagantly generous life; that's not how humans were meant to live. The powers are playing us. Dehumanizing one group because they have too little, dehumanizing another group because they have too much, inflicting us with judgments that keep us from working together to fight them and to fix the problem.

It is time, I believe, for God's people to tell the system to kiss off. It's time for God's people to wake up to what is going on. It looks like it's about us, but it's bigger than us. We've got to know who the real enemy is. It's time to wage war against the powers, and we do that by refusing to make other human beings the enemy. Ephesians 6:12, "If it's got flesh and blood, it's not the enemy." If it's got flesh and blood, it's someone that Jesus died for, which means it's someone we're supposed to be fighting for and against the powers. It doesn't matter whether they're democrat or republican. It doesn't matter whether they're American or Iranian or North Korean. It doesn't matter whether they're straight or whether they're gay. It doesn't matter whether they're liberal or conservative. If it's got flesh and blood, it is not the enemy. Rather, it's someone we're to be fighting for. And the way we do that is by refusing to make them the

enemy. The way we do that is, rather, by insisting on loving them, even if we disagree with them, and serving them and doing good to them as our Lord commands us. If it's got flesh and blood, it's not the enemy. So, also, it doesn't matter whether the person is rich or poor; they're not the enemy. Doesn't matter whether they live in a mansion or whether they're homeless, whether they're in a gated community or living in an inner-city ghetto, they are not the enemy, and there's no role to play in bringing judgments to that. Rather, the way we do warfare against the real enemy is by refusing to make them the enemy, collapsing our judgments and asking the question how can we together resist the system, fight the system, rage at the machine, which is so polluted with the principalities and powers.

What we need to understand is that the way we struggle against the principalities and powers is not just by changing our beliefs. That's a pre-requisite but changing beliefs in and of themselves, that doesn't do anything. It just changed your belief. You fight the system and the powers behind the system by changing how you live. We were saved for the good works. We change how we live. Rocky and I had to decide to relate together differently. We had to agree on what we were going to say and what we're not going to say and how we're going to treat each other in public and things like that, and that's the only way we could fight that system. It wouldn't have done any good if we would have, in the principal's office, decided we're going to reconcile and then we go out and talk the smack we were talking, allowing the friends to egg us on to another fight. Invariably, we would have ended up in the same place we were. Now, what it means, what it means to reconcile is you decide to live differently. You talk differently, you operate differently. The same way it would do no good whatsoever to say, because the Bible tells you to, I have no flesh-and-blood enemy. No, I don't. But then you pick up a gun and shoot them just because your commander in chief tells you to. No. What it means, what it means to have no flesh-and-blood enemy is that you don't shoot them. What it means is that you'd rather obey Jesus and say I will love them and I will do good to them, I will bless them regardless of what they do to me. And that's how we fight the powers, by refusing to make enemies of fellow humans. It does no good whatsoever to say I am reconciled with people of other ethnicities if you continue to live in isolation from them and you're surrounded by folks who just look like you and talk like you and wear the same clothes you do. It doesn't do any good to say you're reconciled with people of other ethnicities if you're always going to insist on your own cultural preferences on where you eat, what music you listen to and where you go to church and what worship you'll participate in. It doesn't do any good to say that you're reconciled with other people of other races if you still harbor suspicions about them and don't collapse your judgments and treat them as individuals. It doesn't do any good to say that you reconcile with people of other ethnicities if you don't live in ways that confront racial injustice. What it means to be reconciled is that you live differently. And the way that we fight the powers that fuel racism is by building bridges, by refusing to live in isolation, by collapsing our judgments, by refusing to cave in to our cultural preferences, by refusing to walk the way we've

always walked but, rather, to build relationships with people who look different than us and wear different clothes than us and then, together, we're fighting the powers that are playing us off one another. And it's the same thing with poverty and the affluent. It doesn't do any good to say we're going to act justly and love mercy if we continue to harbor the judgments that we have about why those people are poor, nah, they just need to work more and have less sex. Or why those people are rich. They're just greedy and they're just hoarding stuff, that we're just playing off one another, we're succumbing to the powers and nothing will be done in the church or in the broader society. It doesn't do any good for the affluent to continue to act unjustly. You can say that you're acting justly and love and compassion, but if you continue to act unjustly and hoard resources and cash in on the good luck that you've got, being born into a system that advantages you, well, then what good is that? That's what James is talking about. What good is it if you say you're warm and well fed but you don't do anything?

Folks, to fight the powers, the affluent and the poor need to agree together to collapse all of our judgments, to walk humbly with our God, and to live in ways and relate in ways that will alleviate injustice and demonstrate compassion. To fight the powers, the affluent and the poor need to agree together that we're going to fight the system, we're going to rebel against the powers that are dehumanizing both of us. We need to wake up today. We need to realize that we're under bondage. Those that have got the American dream, that's got its own form of bondage. See, the way the world does it, it thinks that the way you help the poor is by helping them fulfill the American dream. The American dream is just another trade your idol, trade your bondage. The way we get free is by both of us realizing that we're both trapped in a system that's not really benefitting any of us, not if you're a kingdom person. And we, together, are going to fight that. And this is how we are both liberated. It requires us working together against the system to be liberated. The poor are liberated from the bondage of having too little. The affluent liberated from the bondage of having too much. The poor help the affluent by getting them free from the subhuman existence of living hand and mouth. The poor help the affluent by helping them get out of that bondage to the system. The affluent help the poor by offering resources and not giving handouts, which simply further entrenches, in some ways hurts more. But, rather, by having relationships that empower them to begin to move out of that kind of subhuman level of existence where they're living hand to mouth, worried about being evicted at the turn of the arbitrary decision of some landlord. We have to do it together. And, folks, when we do this together, this is what salvation by grace through faith looks like. Now, to that degree, we're living the way God created us to live. We're doing the warfare that God created us to do. We're living in ways that manifest justice and show compassion. To fight the powers, we need one another. It's not about throwing money at someone or something or some program to alleviate your guilt. That's how I think a lot of folks think about it. Those emergency situations where all they need is your money, that's fine. That's fine. But the long-term thing has got to be something more than that. I just started reading a book yesterday

called "When Helping Hurts." It's by Steven Corbett and Brian Fikkert. Really good book. And how sometimes the ways we think are going to help, just by throwing our resources at folks, trying to get them up more to our level so we feel less guilty, how sometimes that backfires. What is needed is deeper than that. What is needed is a genuine bridge, on this and so many other issues, a bridge that connects us with people who are in a different socio-economic strata than we are. And that runs both ways. Not just one patronizing way from we who have the resources to those people who don't. No. It runs both ways where we help the poor, the poor help us because we're both in bondage, and we both need to identify who the real enemy is. And it's not each other. No. The real enemy are the powers that fuel an unjust system that keep us all in bondage. It's about relationships. It's about the awareness that we all need one another. Now, maybe you're asking the question, well, what do I do, then? What do I do? I'm living out there in North Oaks, I just don't see people who are poor, I don't see people who are different than me, but that's where I feel called to live. Look, that's a good, legitimate question. Let me say two things about it in closing.

One is, we'll be getting to that a little bit more as this thing unfolds, as this seminar, this series unfolds. But the crucial thing is this: Here's the first of the two things. I want to encourage folks, an action step, to get that prayer journal and start praying through the scripture that deals with the poor and the greedy and things of that sort because it has to be internalized, it's got to be part of our heart. One of the reasons we don't see what we can do is because it's not really part of our heart. It's, sort of, a supposed-to rule that gets lodged right there. Okay, I'm supposed to do this, but it's not really in your heart. And until something gets in your heart, you don't have wisdom about it. When we can internalize this and really pray, God, give us your heart for the poor, I'm talking to the affluent now, then, what that does is it begins to change the way you look at the world. It changes your perspective on things. You start to notice things you didn't notice before. And, with that, will come a wisdom. There will be a wisdom there. You will start to see things you didn't see before, and it will become, maybe, clear to you how you're supposed to live in a way that manifests justice and compassion. But it's got to get internalized first.

So I encourage you to get that prayer journal and internalize it and pray over this, meditate on this, talk about it with your friends, your spouse, your children, your kingdom community and internalize this. A second thing, I will just throw out there, is this. We're going to be having this conference October 30th, Friday evening, and then for about six hours on Saturday, and we have workshops, a bunch of workshops that are just practical, how-to stuff, and I want to encourage you all to register for that. It's going to go beyond what we can do here in a sermon series. Get it on the inside, realize who the real enemy is and commit to living against the powers.

Let me pray here, and I want to ask the prayer teams to come forward. If you're here and have any need whatsoever you'd like to have prayer for, I encourage you to come forward and pray with these folks.

Let me end with this. Father, for too long we have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and allowed the powers to play us off against one another. Free us, free us, free us, free us, free us, free us. Free us, God, to live as your handiwork, in the image of God, doing the good works that you've created us to do. Free us, Lord God, to look like Jesus, love like Jesus, serve like Jesus, think like Jesus, see like Jesus, relate like Jesus. Free us, Lord God, to move out of our comfort zones and build relationships with people who are different than us, God, that we may learn, that we may benefit, that we may be expanded, that we, together, may be freed. We pray these things in Jesus' name, and all the people said Amen. God bless you guys. Go out and build the kingdom.