Holiness and God’s Concern for the Marginalized: The Bible Speaks

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Concern for the Marginalized: Scripture’s Radically Different Approach

• In the culture of the biblical world people owed loyalty only to members of their own group.

• All others were regarded as outsiders and were regarded with suspicion because the group did not know or understand the outsiders’ motives and values.

• Outsiders were defined in terms of nationality — aliens — in terms of neighborhood — strangers — and in terms of ability to contribute to society — the poor, the disabled, and orphans and widows.

• Such outsiders — the marginalized — were ignored, hated, oppressed, and devalued by the culture, but not by God.
Concern for the Marginalized: Scripture’s Radically Different Approach

• The Old Testament demonstrates repeatedly God’s concern for the aliens and strangers, the poor, the oppressed, the widows and orphans, and the disabled – the marginalized

• The New Testament makes a similar case and adds to the marginalized those who were regarded within Judaism as impure for whatever reason of defilement

• God’s so-called “preferential option for the poor” was not just for the poor but for all who were marginalized

• From the records of the 2nd Century A.D. it appears the early church “got it” and the history of Christianity is marked by love of the marginalized though the Church was rather inconsistent in her efforts
Biblical Vocabulary - Alien

• The Hebrew word most often translated “alien, sojourner, stranger,” is גֵּר (gēr). It referred to a person who, either alone or with his family, leaves his village and tribe to seek shelter and survival elsewhere. The gēr may flee because of war (2 Sam 4:3), famine (Ru 1:1), pestilence, blood-guilt, or a variety of other reasons. Though the place to which he travels may offer survival his right to own land, to marry, to benefit from the administration of justice, to participate in worship or in war is limited. The word first appears in Gen 12:10 to describe Abram residing in Egypt as an alien.

• The noun appears more than 90 times in the OT and the concept is even more frequent because the cognate verb, גור (gûr), is often used with a named subject
Biblical Vocabulary – Stranger, Sojourner

• A word that is often translated with the same English array of nouns is the Hebrew תּוֹשָׁב (tôšāb). Occurring 14 times in the OT, half of which come in Leviticus, tôšāb is often used in conjunction with gēr. The distinction seems to be that gēr refers to a permanent resident alien while tôšāb refers to a temporary, landless wage earner. The tôšāb was less assimilated than the gēr and, in some instances, appears to have been attached to someone’s household (Lev 22:10).

• It is possible that at some periods of the OT the tôšāb was used to refer to a slave who had been set free or a person serving as a hired servant.
Biblical Vocabulary – The Poor

• There are a variety of Hebrew words used in the OT for the poor and needy and two major Greek words used in the NT

• The word דַּל (dal) is often translated poor or one who is of low status. It points to a person who lacks the normal provisions but is not yet destitute. Physical deprivation is part of its meaning. (This word is also used to describe the scrawny cows of Joseph’s dream in Genesis 41. It denotes a person who is powerless and insignificant, perhaps even helpless and who is part of lower class in Israel.

• The word אֶבְיוֹן (ʾebyôn) describes a needy person, one who is poor in a material sense. He may have lost his ancestral land; he may be reduced to borrowing, he may lack food or clothing, he is in need of protection
Biblical Vocabulary – The Poor

• Another common Hebrew word translated “poor” is עָנִי (ʿānî). This word describes a person who suffers some type of disability or distress. It is often used in conjunction with the two previous words noted. The ʿānî lives from day to day and is subject to oppression, lacking the normal social defenses. He may be sick or physically weak. The physical affliction may lead to a spiritual or psychological or inner affliction. This meaning may actually come close to our concept of depression. The word is often translated “humble” in such circumstances but its meaning is not humility but in lowly circumstances.
Biblical Vocabulary – The Poor

• Another frequently used Hebrew word for the poor is the verb רועש (rûš) meaning to be poor. In distinction to the other words, rûš means to be destitute

• Several other Hebrew words are translated poor or needy, but are used so rarely that it is hard to determine their distinctive meaning

• The variety of words used for the poor and the range of meaning encompassed by their distinctiveness indicates that poverty was a major concern of Hebrew society and especially a major concern of God
Biblical Vocabulary – The Poor

• The Greek NT uses three words for the poor, two of which are closely related:
  • The word πένης (penēs) is the general Greek word for a poor person who works for his or her living. It is used in the NT only in 2 Cor. 9:9 where it appears as a quotation from Psalm 112:9
  • The related word πενιχρός (penichros) is used in its only NT usage in Luke 21:2 to describe the poor widow who put her small coin in the offering
  • The common NT word is πτώχος (ptōchos) which refers to a person who has nothing and must beg others for the basic necessities of survival. It is used at least 34 times in the NT
Provision for the Alien (gēr) to Participate in the Passover

- Exodus 12:43 - The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance for the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, but any slave who has been purchased may eat of it after he has been circumcised; no bound or hired servant may eat of it. It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. The whole congregation of Israel shall celebrate it. If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the passover to the Lord, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it; there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you. All the Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. That very day the Lord brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company.

- 13:1 The Lord said to Moses: Consecrate (NASB has sanctify) to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine.
Cleansing from Sin for the Alien (gēr) on Yom Kippur

- Leviticus 16:29f makes provision for the alien to be cleansed from sin and so to benefit from the Day of Atonement
- 29 This shall be a statute to you forever: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall deny yourselves, and shall do no work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you. 30 For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord.
Sexual Purity Required of the Alien (gēr)

• Leviticus 18 deals with the degrees of sexual purity required of Israel as expression of their holiness
• Leviticus 18:3 - You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you.
• Leviticus 18:24-26 - **Do not defile yourselves** in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. 25 Thus the land became defiled; and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. 26 But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, **either the citizen or the alien** who resides among you.
Holiness in Leviticus 19

• The chapter begins with a command to holiness in verse 2 - Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

• This command is repeated in a variety of places in the Old and New Testaments.

• It is “abbreviated” or referred to by short-hand in numerous places in Leviticus by the words, “I am the LORD your God” or “I am the LORD”.

• Leviticus 18:2 had prefaced Leviticus 18 on sexual purity with the words, “I am the LORD your God” indicating the whole of chapter 18 is a holiness text.
Holiness and the Marginalized in Leviticus 19

• Leviticus 19:9-10 - When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor (עָנִי (ʿānî)) and the alien (גֵּר (gēr)): I am the LORD your God.

• Israel was not to reap the harvest of the edges of their fields, strip the vineyard bare, nor pick up the fallen grapes so that the poor and the alien would have food. The words “I am the LORD your God” connect this concern for the poor and the alien to the command to be holy as God is holy that leads off the chapter.
Holiness and the Marginalized in Leviticus 19

• Leviticus 19:13b - you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning
• The reason the laborer must be paid at the end of the day was that he would have been so poor as to have needed that day’s wage to buy food for that night or the next day
• Leviticus 19:14 – You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.
• This verse specifies the kind of behavior one is to avoid with people of disability. The closing “I am the LORD” connects both vv. 13b and 14 to the command to be holy as God is holy in Leviticus 19:2
Holiness and the Marginalized in Leviticus 19

• Leviticus 19:15-16 - You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor (dal) or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. 16 You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

• Justice is to be given to the poor and the great alike without regard to the person’s status in the community. The words “I am the LORD” again connect this command for justice to the command to be holy as God is holy in verse 2 of this chapter
Holiness and the Marginalized in Leviticus 19

• Leviticus 19:33-34 culminates this amazing chapter connecting justice to the alien and other marginalized people of society with holiness.

• When an alien (gēr) resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien (gēr). 34 The alien (gēr) who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien (gēr) as yourself, for you were aliens (gērim) in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

• The closing phrase, “I am the LORD your God” connects both verses 33 and 34 to the command of Leviticus 19:2 to be holy as God is holy.
Holiness and the Marginalized in Leviticus 19

• When an **alien** (*gēr*) resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the **alien** (*gēr*). 34 The **alien** (*gēr*) who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the **alien** (*gēr*) as yourself, for you were **aliens** (*gērim*) in the land of Egypt: I am the **LORD** your God. – Leviticus 19:33-34

• Note: 1) the command to not oppress the alien who resides as an alien among you. That is, do not use your superior social position and leverage to degrade the alien, do not create pressure on the alien, do not increase pressure on the alien, renounce your social power in relationship to the alien.
Holiness and the Marginalized in Leviticus 19

• When an **alien** (*gēr*) resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the **alien** (*gēr*). 34 The **alien** (*gēr*) who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the **alien** (*gēr*) as yourself, for you were **aliens** (*gērim*) in the land of Egypt: I am the **LORD** your God. – Leviticus 19:33-34

• Note: 2) The alien shall have equal rights with the citizen. This would include equal access to due process of the law, it would include equal access to employment and opportunities to make the level of living enjoyed by the citizens, it would indicate that equal social acceptance with that given to citizens.
Holiness and the Marginalized in Leviticus 19

• When an alien (gēr) resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien (gēr). The alien (gēr) who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien (gēr) as yourself, for you were aliens (gērim) in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. – Leviticus 19:33-34

• Note: 3) Israelites are commanded to love the alien as they love themselves. This forbids Israel the common practice thinking about, speaking to, or treating the alien any differently than one would oneself. This text sums up all the other commands regarding the alien in this chapter. It should also be understood in relationship to Leviticus 19:18, You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. This phrase in v. 18 connects love of neighbor to the call to holiness; in v. 34 it connects love of the alien as oneself to that same call to holiness.
Holiness and the Marginalized in Leviticus 23

- Leviticus 23:22 - When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor (עָנִי) and the alien (גֵּר): I am the LORD your God.

- This verse is identical to Leviticus 19:9-10 with the exception that it omits the part of verse 10 that deals with the vineyard and the fallen grapes. The principal of providing food for the poor is the same and the means by which this command is connected to the command to be holy as God is holy is the same, namely, I am the LORD your God.
Holiness and the Marginalized in Leviticus 24

• Leviticus 24:22 - You shall have one law for the alien (גֵּר (gēr)) and for the citizen: for I am the LORD your God.

• The principle of one law for the alien and the citizen echoes the statement above in Exodus 12:49

• It is a logical extension of the command in Leviticus 19:34 to love the alien as yourself

• The closing phrase, I am the LORD your God, connects this command for equal treatment under law for the alien and the citizen to the command of Leviticus 19:2 to be holy as God is holy
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• The following texts raise similar expectations on how Israel was to respond to the alien though the specific command to holiness does not appear as closely in the context as in Leviticus:

• Numbers 9:14 - Any alien (גר גֵּר) residing among you who wishes to keep the passover to the LORD shall do so according to the statute of the passover and according to its regulation; you shall have one statute for both the resident alien (גר gēr) and the native.

• The alien is to be provided with equal access to Passover worship.

• The call for one statute requires that the law be equal for the alien and the native citizen.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• Numbers 15:14-16 - An alien (גֵּר (gēr)) who lives with you, or who takes up permanent residence among you, and wishes to offer an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD, shall do as you do. 15 As for the assembly, there shall be for both you and the resident alien (גֵּר (gēr)) a single statute, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you and the alien (גֵּר (gēr)) shall be alike before the LORD. 16 You and the alien (גֵּר (gēr)) who resides with you shall have the same law and the same ordinance.

• The two concepts seen above are here also: equal access to Israel’s worship and equality before the law.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• Numbers 15:29-30 - For both the native among the Israelites and the alien (גֵּר (gēr)) residing among them— you shall have the same law for anyone who acts in error. 30 But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien (גֵּר (gēr)), affronts the LORD, and shall be cut off from among the people.

• Numbers 19:10 – The one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. This shall be a perpetual statute for the Israelites and for the alien (גֵּר (gēr)) residing among them.

• Again, the alien is granted equal access to worship among the Israelites
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• Numbers 35:15 - These six cities shall serve as refuge for the Israelites, for the resident or transient alien (גֶּר (gēr) and תּוֹשָׁב (tôšāḇ)) among them, so that anyone who kills a person without intent may flee there.

• With regard to the cities of refuge to which a person who accidentally kills another may flee to escape the vengeance killing from the deceased’s family are equally available to the alien and the stranger along with Israeliite citizens. This is not only equal access before the law, it is also specific concern on the part of God and the Old Testament for these marginalized persons.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

- Deuteronomy 1:16 - I charged your judges at that time: “Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien (גֵּר (gēr)).

- The words are on the lips of Moses describing his instructions to the persons who would serve as judges. The judicial system is to give a fair hearing and rightful judgment to the alien as well as the citizen. Equal access before the law for alien was the law.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• Deuteronomy 5:14 - The seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien (גֵּר (gēr)) in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.

• The Sabbath law providing rest and renewal applies equally to the alien as to the Israelite. This indicates God’s desire that he and Israel provide equal protection and care to the alien as to the Israelite citizen.

• The similar form of the Sabbath law in Exodus 20:10 has the same provision for the alien.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• Deuteronomy 24:17 - You shall not deprive a resident alien (גֵּר (gēr)) or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow’s garment in pledge.
• Deuteronomy 27:19 - “Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien (גֵּר (gēr)), the orphan, and the widow of justice.”
• Again, equal access to justice for the alien.
• Note also the extension of justice in this text to the orphan and to the widow, also marginalized persons in the ancient world.
• The seriousness of this command is seen in the curse attached to it in Deut. 27:19.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• Deuteronomy 24:19-21 - When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien (גֵּר (gēr)), the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. 20 When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien (גֵּר (gēr)), the orphan, and the widow. 21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien (גֵּר (gēr)), the orphan, and the widow.

• This is the same command given in Leviticus 19:9-10 where is it connected to the command to be holy as God is holy. Here, the command is extended beyond the alien to the orphan and widow.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• Jeremiah 7:5-7 - For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, ⁶ if you do not oppress the alien (גֵּר (gēr)), the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, ⁷ then I will dwell with you in this place.

• This is part of Jeremiah’s call to Judah to return to covenant obedience (implication - holiness) as the condition for not being sent into captivity. Unjust treatment of the alien, orphan, and widow, is placed alongside idolatry as equal cause for captivity.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• Jeremiah 22:3 - Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien (מָיוֹן (gēr)), the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.

• Another command from God to provide justice for the alien, orphan, and widow and to see to it that these marginalized persons suffer no violence or wrong treatment.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

- Ezekiel 22:7-8 - Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the alien (גֵּר (gēr)) residing within you suffers extortion; the orphan and the widow are wronged in you. 8 You have despised my holy things, and profaned my sabbaths.

- Extortion of the alien is treated as a parallel sin to failure to honor father and mother and violating the holiness of the Sabbath.

- The concern with alien is also extended to the orphan and widow in this text.

- All of this is despising the “holy things”, that is the holiness of God which is the pattern for the holiness God requires of us.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

- Ezekiel 22:29 - The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the **poor** (עָנִי ('ānî)) and **needy** (אֶבְיוֹן ('ebyôn)), and have extorted from the **alien** (גֵּר (gēr)) without redress.

- These are words of God to Ezekiel complaining that his people have violated his concerns for justice for the poor, needy, and aliens.

- Part of the problem is that these marginalized persons have been mistreated without redress – that is without equal access to and protection from the law.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

• Zechariah 7:9-10 - Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness (חֶ֣סֶד) and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien (גֵּר), or the poor (עָנִי); and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.

• The commands that are placed in parallel construction are fascinating: 1. Rendering true judgments, 2. Showing hesed – steadfast love – and mercy to one another, 3. Not oppressing the widow, orphan, alien, and the poor, and 4. Not devising evil in your hearts against others.

• Oppressing – failing to treat the marginalized as God designs - is a failure of true judgment, hesed, and mercy.
Similar Texts Regarding the Marginalized

- Malachi 3:5 - Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien (גֵּר), and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

- It is interesting in this text that thrusting aside the alien, oppressing the hired workers, the widow, and the orphan, are placed in parallel with adultery and failure to give reverence (fear) to the LORD.

- This surely connects once again the treatment of the marginalized with holiness.
Treatment of the Alien - Summation

- The *gēr* was to be present for the reading of the Law (Deut 31:12) showing that he was lived under its expectations. The law concerning “unleavened bread” applied to him as well as the native (Ex 12:19), and a circumcised *gēr* could keep Passover (Ex 12:48f.; Num 9:14). He was also included in the festival of the Great Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29) and was expected to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Deut 16:14). With the native he was threatened with the death penalty if he offered a sacrifice to a foreign god (Lev 17:5f.) and was forbidden to eat blood (17:10, 12, 13). Though in contrast to the native he was allowed to eat what had died or was torn (Deut 14:21), like the native Israelite he underwent special cleansing (Lev 17:15f.). He was also included in the rites of cleansing with the ashes of the red heifer (Num 19:10). The laws of sexual chastity applied to him as well as the native (Lev 18:26) along with the Sabbath laws (Ex 20:10; 23:12). In a word he was to show the same fidelity to the Lord (Lev 20:2).
Treatment of the Alien - Summation

• He also enjoyed many of the same rights as the native and was not to be oppressed (Ex 22:21 [H 20]; Lev 19:3; Jer 7:6; 22:3). He is mentioned in connection with the poor (Lev 19:10; cf. 23:22) and with orphans and widows (Deut 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17; 26:13; 27:19). With them he shared the sheaf left in the field (24:19) and the gleanings in the olive trees and in the vineyards (24:20–21) along with the tithe every three years (14:27; 26:12). He was to be treated righteously in judgment (1:16; 24:17; 27:19) and the six asylum cities were also cities of refuge for him (Num 35:15). In a word the Lord loves the gēr (Deut 10:18). Israel should not oppress him because they themselves were oppressed and know his soul (Ex 22:21 [H 20]; Deut 10:19). They were to love him as themselves (Lev 19:34).
Consideration for the Alien

• Almost as many texts as have been cited above make the statement that Israel is to care for the alien because she was an alien in Egypt. God calls on his people not to forget what he saved them from. They are to put themselves in the alien’s place.

• This sounds a lot like the Golden Rule.

• 1 Peter uses the language of “aliens and exiles” to describe the way in which believers are to think of themselves. Our failure to care for the alien means we have become a part of the world and have lost our ability to identify with God’s perspective. Perhaps we have lost our citizenship in heaven also (Phil. 3:20).
A Comment Regarding Application

• The biblical world did not define citizenship with legal terminology. It did not issue passports or green cards. But the biblical record cannot be misunderstood; God cares for the alien – the person from another country who comes to a new place.

• The closest analogy to the alien of Scripture in our context is the immigrant. The texts that we have examined make it abundantly clear that no one can mistreat an immigrant and please God. Anyone who aspires to holiness of heart and life must love the immigrant just as themselves and must provide equal access to the law and justice for them. To turn our hearts away from the plight of the immigrant is to turn our hearts away from God.
Jesus on the Poor

• Matthew 19:21 - “If you wish to be perfect (teleios), go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor (ptōchois), and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

• This text appears in the passage often given the heading – The Rich Young Man or The Rich Young Ruler based on the parallel accounts in Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-30.

• Matthew’s account does not identify this seeker as rich or young. He is simply “someone” (lit. “one”) so that this text applies to everyone.

• Matthew alone frames the man’s response in terms of being perfect (teleios).
Jesus on the Poor

• Matthew 19:21 - “If you wish to be perfect (teleios), go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor (ptōchois), and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

• Though almost all modern translations translate teleios as mature in most contexts, virtually all translate it as “perfect” in this passage.

• In Wesleyan theology being perfect (teleios) is the goal (telos) of holiness.

• Jesus connected holiness to divesting ourselves of all our possessions and giving all we have to the poor (ptōchoi) those who are destitute and who will not survive without the support of others.
Jesus on the Poor

- Matthew 11:4-5 - Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor (ptōchoi) have good news brought to them.
- The context is the question of John the Baptist while in prison whether Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus’ evidence for his messianic identity is his ministry to the blind, lame, lepers, deaf, dead, and the poor.
- To be a follower of Jesus would be to bring good news to the poor.
Jesus on the Poor

• Luke 14:12-14 - He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor (ptōchos), the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

• These words are a command of Jesus to one who invited him to a meal to provide the gift of hospitality to the poor and the disabled rather than to one’s peers who can repay the favor.
Jesus on the Poor

• Luke 14:21 - Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor (ptōchous), the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’

• This appears in the parable that follows Jesus’ command to the one who had invited him to a meal in the preceding example.

• Again, it reflects Jesus’ concern for the poor and disabled.
Jesus on the Poor

• A common unchristian objection to concern for the poor given by so-called Christians is the statement of Jesus, “The poor you always have with you.”

• This with slight variations appears in Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7; and John 12:8.

• What is seldom realized at the popular level is that these words of Jesus are an approximate quotation from Deuteronomy 15:11, “There will always be poor people (אֶבְיוֹן (ʾebyôn)) in the land.” (NIV)

• For at least the past 100 years scholars have understood the quotations in the NT from the OT function to bring a larger context to mind.
Jesus on the Poor

• That is to say, when Jesus said, “The poor you always have with you,” he was really saying, “See Deuteronomy 15:11.”

• The full verse of Deuteronomy 15:11 reads: There will always be poor people (אֶבְיוֹן (ʾebyôn)) in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor (עָנִי (ʿānî)) and needy (אֶבְיוֹן (ʾebyôn)) in your land.

• Thus Jesus’ words, “The poor you always have with you” mean, “The Bible says to be openhanded toward the poor and needy.”

• This saying of Jesus does not excuse his followers from helping the poor; it commands generosity to the poor and needy.
James on the Poor

• James 2:2-6 - For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person (ptōchos) in dirty clothes also comes in, ³ and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor (ptōchos) you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor (ptōchos) in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor (ptōchon).
James on the Poor

- This text turns to what happens in church when we gather. Failure to welcome poor people in dirty clothes is specifically equated to judgementalism and evil thoughts.
- Verse 5 specifically states that God has chosen the poor to be the ones who are wealthy with regard to faith.
- Verse 6 accuses church-goers of dishonoring the poor when we are (and when we act) more interested in those who dress better and obviously have more money.
- The logical converse to verse 6 is that God calls us to give honor to the poor.
Hebrews 11:32 – For time would fail me . . .

- Old Testament texts that make a similar point with regard to the poor include:
  - Exodus 22:25; 23:3, 6, 11; Leviticus 14:21; Deuteronomy 24:12; Psalms 72:2, 4, 12, 19, 21; 112:9; 113:7; 140:12; Proverbs 14:21, 31; 17:5; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9, 16, 22; 29:7, 14; 31:9; Isaiah 3:14, 15; 10:2; 11:4; 14:30; 25:4; 58:7; Jeremiah 2:34; 22:16; Ezekiel 18:12; Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4, 6; and Habakkuk 3:14
  
- There can be no doubt of God’s concern for the poor and that God requires his people to be concerned for the poor.
  
- Failure to care for the poor contradicts holiness.
Hebrews 11:32 – For time would fail me . . .

• Proverbs 19:17 - Whoever is kind to the poor (ָאָל (dal)) lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full.
Questions to think about

• What can we do to make our churches, ourselves, and our people more hospitable to the poor?
• What can we actually do to help the lives of the marginalized?
• How do we learn to see these people? They have become invisible to us.
• This concern for the poor and marginalized was part of our Nazarene heritage in the early days of the denomination. How do we recover this commitment to the heart of God in the polarized political context in which we live?