
CHAPTER 1

*For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore
I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother,
to thy poor, and to thy needy in the land. Deut. 15:11.*

WHY POVERTY AND DISTRESS?

Blessed Are the Merciful.—The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” There never was a time when there was greater need for the exercise of mercy than today. The poor are all around us, the distressed, the afflicted, the sorrowing, and those who are ready to perish.

Those who have acquired riches have acquired them through the exercise of the talents that were given them of God, but these talents for the acquiring of property were given to them that they might relieve those who are in poverty. These gifts were bestowed upon men by Him who maketh His sun to shine and His rain to fall upon the just and the unjust, that by the fruitfulness of the earth men might have abundant supplies for all their need. The fields have been blessed of God, and “of His goodness He hath prepared for the poor.”—*Signs of the Times*, June 13, 1892.

Suffering and Misery Not Intended by God.—There are many who complain of God because the world is so full of want and suffering, but God never meant that this misery should exist. He never meant that one man should have an abundance of the luxuries of life while the children of others cry for bread. The Lord is a God of benevolence.—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 273.

God has made men His stewards, and He is not to be charged with the sufferings, the misery, the nakedness, and the want of humanity. The Lord has made ample provision for all. He has given to thousands of men large supplies with which to alleviate the want of their fellows; but those whom God has made stewards have not stood the test, for they have failed to relieve the suffering and the needy.

When men who have been abundantly blessed of Heaven with large wealth fail to carry out God's design, and do not relieve the poor and the oppressed, the Lord is displeased and will surely visit them. They have no excuse for withholding from their neighbors the help that God has put it into their power to provide; and God is dishonored, His character is misinterpreted by Satan, and He is represented as a stern judge who causes suffering to come upon the creatures He has made. This misrepresentation of God's character is made to appear as truth, and thus through the temptation of the enemy men's hearts are hardened against God. Satan charges upon God the very evil he himself has caused men to commit by withholding their means from the suffering. He attributes to God his own characteristics.—*Review and Herald*, June 26, 1894.

There Need Be No Suffering, No Destitution.—If men would do their duty as faithful stewards of their Lord's goods, there would be no cry for bread, none suffering in destitution, none naked and in want. It is the unfaithfulness of men that brings about the state of suffering in which humanity is plunged. If those whom God has made stewards would but appropriate their Lord's goods to the object for which He gave to them, this state of suffering would not exist. The Lord tests men by giving them an abun-

dance of good things, just as He tested the rich man of the parable. If we prove ourselves unfaithful in the unrighteous mammon, who shall entrust to us the true riches? It will be those who have stood the test on the earth, who have been found faithful, who have obeyed the words of the Lord in being merciful, in using their means for the advancement of His kingdom, that will hear from the lips of the Master, "Well done, good and faithful servant."—*Ibid.*

Some Rich—Some Poor.—The reason why God has permitted some of the human family to be so rich and some so poor will remain a mystery to men till eternity, unless they enter into right relations with God and carry out His plans instead of acting on their own selfish ideas.—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 280.

To Encourage Love and Mercy.—In the providence of God events have been so ordered that the poor are always with us, in order that there may be a constant exercise in the human heart of the attributes of mercy and love. Man is to cultivate the tenderness and compassion of Christ; he is not to separate himself from the sorrowing, the afflicted, the needy, and the distressed.—*Signs of the Times*, June 13, 1892.

To Develop a Godlike Character in Man.—While the world needs sympathy, while it needs the prayers and assistance of God's people, while it needs to see Christ in the lives of His followers, the people of God are equally in need of opportunities that draw out their sympathies, give efficiency to their prayers, and develop in them a character like that of the divine pattern.

It is to provide these opportunities that God has placed among us the poor, the unfortunate, the sick,

and the suffering. They are Christ's legacy to His church, and they are to be cared for as He would care for them. In this way God takes away the dross and purifies the gold, giving us that culture of heart and character which we need.

The Lord could carry forward His work without our co-operation. He is not dependent on us for our money, our time, or our labor. But the church is very precious in His sight. It is the case which contains His jewels, the fold which encloses His flock, and He longs to see it without spot or blemish or any such thing. He yearns after it with unspeakable love. This is why He has given us opportunities to work for Him, and He accepts our labors as tokens of our love and loyalty.—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 261.

That We May Understand the Mercy of God.—The poor man as well as the rich man is the object of God's special care and attention. Take away poverty, and we should have no way of understanding the mercy and love of God, no way of knowing the compassionate and sympathetic heavenly Father.—Letter 83, 1902.

God Gives to Us That We Might Give to Others.—God imparts His blessing to us that we may impart to others. When we ask Him for our daily bread He looks into our hearts to see if we will share the same with those more needy than ourselves. When we pray "God be merciful to me a sinner," He watches to see if we will manifest compassion toward those with whom we associate. This is the evidence of our connection with God, that we are merciful even as our Father in heaven is merciful.—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 283, 284.

Withholding Dwarfs Spiritual Growth.—Nothing

saps spirituality from the soul more quickly than to enclose it in selfishness and self-caring. Those who indulge self and neglect to care for the souls and bodies of those for whom Christ has given His life, are not eating of the bread of life or drinking of the water of the well of salvation. They are dry and sapless, like a tree that bears no fruit. They are spiritual dwarfs, who consume their means on self; but "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—*Review and Herald*, Jan. 15, 1895.

It is because the rich neglect to do the work for the poor that God designed they should do, that they grow more proud, more self-sufficient, more self-indulgent, and hard-hearted. They separate the poor from them simply because they are poor, and thus give them occasion to become envious and jealous. Many become bitter, and are imbued with hatred toward those who have everything when they have nothing.

God weighs actions, and everyone who has been unfaithful in his stewardship, who has failed to remedy evils which were in his power to remedy, will be of no esteem in the courts of heaven. Those who are indifferent to the wants of the needy will be counted unfaithful stewards, and will be registered as enemies of God and man. Those who misappropriate the means that God has entrusted to them to help the very ones who need their help, prove that they have no connection with Christ, because they fail to manifest the tenderness of Christ toward those who are less fortunate than themselves.—*Ibid.*, Dec. 10, 1895.

If the Rich Walk in Christ's Footsteps.—The rich man is a steward of God, and if he walks in Christ's footsteps, maintaining a humble, godly life, he becomes, through the transformation of character,

mEEK and lowly in heart. He realizes that his possessions are only lent treasures, and he feels that a sacred trust has been committed to him to help the needy and suffering, in Christ's stead. This work will bring its reward in talents and treasures laid up beside the throne of God. Thus the rich man may make a spiritual success of life, as a faithful steward of his Lord's goods.—Manuscript 22, 1898.

Suffering—One Means of Perfecting Character.—

The Saviour's words have a message of comfort to those also who are suffering affliction or bereavement. Our sorrows do not spring out of the ground. God "doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." When He permits trials and afflictions, it is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." If received in faith, the trial that seems so bitter and hard to bear will prove a blessing. The cruel blow that blights the joys of earth will be the means turning our eyes to heaven. How many there are who would never have known Jesus had not sorrow led them to seek comfort in Him!

The trials of life are God's workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace.

The Lord will work for all who put their trust in Him. Precious victories will be gained by the faithful. Precious lessons will be learned. Precious experiences will be realized.—*Mount of Blessing*, pp. 10, 11.

Affliction and Calamity No Indication of God's Disfavor.—"As Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." . . .

It was generally believed by the Jews that sin is punished in this life. Every affliction was regarded as the penalty of some wrongdoing, either of the sufferer himself or of his parents. It is true that all suffering results from the transgression of God's law, but this truth had become perverted. Satan, the author of sin and all its results, had led men to look upon disease and death as proceeding from God—as punishment arbitrarily inflicted on account of sin. Hence one upon whom some great affliction or calamity had fallen, had the additional burden of being regarded as a great sinner. . . .

God had given a lesson designed to prevent this. The history of Job had shown that suffering is inflicted by Satan, and is overruled by God for purposes of mercy. But Israel did not understand the lesson. The same error for which God had reproved the friends of Job was repeated by the Jews in their rejection of Christ.

The belief of the Jews in regard to the relation of sin and suffering was held by Christ's disciples. While Jesus corrected their error, He did not explain the cause of the man's affliction, but told them what would be the result. Because of it the works of God would be made manifest. "As long as I am in the world," He said, "I am the light of the world." Then having anointed the eyes of the blind man, He sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam, and the man's sight was

restored. Thus Jesus answered the question of the disciples in a practical way, as He usually answered questions put to Him from curiosity. The disciples were not called upon to discuss the question as to who had sinned or had not sinned, but to understand the power and mercy of God in giving sight to the blind.—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 470, 471.

Christ to Be Seen and Heard Through Us.—God designs that the sick, the unfortunate, those possessed of evil spirits, shall hear His voice through us. Through His human agents He desires to be a comforter, such as the world has never before seen. His words are to be voiced by His followers: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me.”

The Lord will work through every soul that will give himself up to be worked, not only to preach but to minister to the despairing and to inspire hope in the hearts of the hopeless. We are to act our part in relieving and softening the miseries of this life. The miseries and mysteries of this life are as dark and cloudy as they were thousands of years ago. There is something for us to do: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” There are needy close by us; the suffering are in our very borders. We must try to help them. By the grace of Christ, the sealed fountains of earnest, Christlike work are to be unsealed. In the strength of Him who has all strength we are to work as we have never worked before.—Manuscript 65b, 1898.