

Editorial

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A YouGov poll carried out in February this year for the charity Christians Against Poverty (CAP) shows that the number of people living in poverty in the UK is on the increase. The data reveals that half of adults (25.9m) have gone without heat at some point this winter, with over six million (12 per cent, 6.3m) people going without heat on a daily basis. Around a third (16.9m) have had to skip meals, with 40 per cent of households with children doing so. The Trussell Trust has seen a staggering increase in the number of food parcels it has delivered, rising from 61,000 in 2010/11 to 2.5 million in 2020/21. The data makes grim reading and is a major concern as the situation is only likely to get worse over the coming months.

The inequalities between those who have wealth and those who don't have long existed. Governments continue to analyse the data and define who is on the bottom rung of the economic ladder. They devise strategies to redistribute wealth to those most in need and, yet the problem remains unsolved.

However, poverty is more than an economic problem to be fixed. Rather, it is a wound that needs to be healed. At its root, poverty is not about money; it is about distorted and marred relationships, with God and with each other, and the divisions we create within our society.

Towards the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus rebukes the disciples for their

reaction to a woman anointing Jesus with an expensive perfume. His retort, 'The poor will always be with you' is a reference to Deuteronomy 15.4 (NIV): 'there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you.' God provides for his people; there is more than enough to go round. However, there is a condition: 'if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today' (v. 5). There will be blessings and abundance in the Promised Land but only if the people walk with God. Jesus' statement was intended to shame the disciples and remind us that the poor are still among us because we have failed to keep God's commands.

Poverty exists because of sin. As Chris Shannahan discusses in our opening article, we must recognise that poverty is multidimensional, a consequence of systemic injustice and 'an insidious form of violence embedded in our social practices'. This injustice and violence are a distortion of what God intended the world to be and we must work with God to bring about its healing.

CAP has been fighting poverty since 1996. Since then, as Lyn Weston describes, tens of thousands of lives have been positively impacted through practical help and biblical values.

Many of those that CAP has helped over the years will have been part of the gig economy or on zero-hour contracts where they have little or no job security. Matt Williams reminds

us that poverty doesn't just hit the unemployed. The number of working families struggling to pay the bills is on the increase: 'Seventeen per cent of those in working households currently live in poverty.'

Over the decades there have been clear divides about the health outcomes of people in different social classes. As Jo Dearlove and David McLoughlin discuss, successive governments have recognised that people from poorer areas tend to have worse health and life expectancy, but have largely failed to act due to the cost. The recent pandemic only further emphasised the feeling of vulnerability within poorer communities and poor diet is increasing the prevalence of diabetes.

We end with some reflections on 'Who are the poor in the life of Jesus?' Against the backdrop of first-century Palestine, David McLoughlin shows how Jesus, in his use of parables, experience of the people, the vast majority of whom lived in poverty, and provokes them to see their world clearly but from a renewed perspective of the Kingdom of God.

I would like to thank Hannah Rich at Theos for her help on this edition of Transmission. If you have time, please read her report, *Beyond Left and Right: Finding consensus in economic inequality*, which is available from www.theosthinktank.co.uk.