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Sermon Notes

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Spend Yourself on Behalf of the Needy

Isaiah 58:1-12

Isaiah 58 is one of the most challenging chapters in the Bible on social justice... on God's demand that his people show their love for him by loving their neighbor as themselves

He calls on people to a vigorous life of self-sacrifice, of SPENDING YOURSELVES on behalf of the poor and needy

Few chapters will search us and probe us and thoroughly as this one

I. Exposing Hypocrisy and Oppression (vs. 1-5)

A. Proclaim to Jacob Their Hypocrisy (vs. 1)

Isaiah 58:1-2 "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. ² For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.

1. Isaiah exposes the hypocrisy and wickedness of Jewish religionists of his day
2. He commands Isaiah to SHOUT ALOUD and not hold back... to DECLARE to Israel their sins... he wants them declared and exposed
3. They were outwardly obeying the Laws of Moses in their formal religion, but they were actually REBELLING against him at the same time
4. This has been a repeated theme with Isaiah... they had the temple of the Lord and brought a parade of sacrificial animals resulting in a river of sacrificial blood
5. But the whole time, they were living wicked lives—oppressing the poor and needy, violating God's sacred commands

6. In Isaiah 1, the prophet had exposed this hypocritical religious MACHINE

Isaiah 1:11-15 "The multitude of your sacrifices-- what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations-- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood

7. Again in Isaiah 29, he does the same thing

Isaiah 29:13 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.

8. Here again, we have the same issue

B. A Nation that Seemed to Seek God (vs. 2)

Isaiah 58:2-3 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ³ 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'

1. Isaiah exposes their seeming desire to draw near to God
2. They go through the outward patterns of religion... seeking God, praying, fasting, wanting just decisions, wanting God's intimacy
3. But it was all a sham... they had actually FORSAKEN THE COMMANDS of their God

C. Fasting While Sinning (vs. 3-5)

Isaiah 58:3-5 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. ⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

1. First, notice their attitude: WHY HAVE WE FASTED AND YOU HAVE NOT NOTICED??

- a. They seem to think their depriving themselves for a very short time of some food put God in a DEBTOR'S POSITION... as if he owed them something

Clearly they have forgotten the exalted holiness of God, forgotten how Abraham their forefather approached God with overwhelming reverence, calling himself "dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). Clearly they have forgotten that we, the descendants of Adam deserve nothing but condemnation from such a holy God.

Clearly they had forgotten Isaiah 57:15:

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

There is NONE of that spirit of humility, bowing low before such an exalted God here!

- b. Also... how did they KNOW that God had not heard, was not answering?
- c. Perhaps there was some kind of drought, and they expected after a very short time of fasting and prayer that the rains would fall on the ground and the crops flourish as a result

Like we have a VENDING MACHINE view of fasting and prayer... put in a few coins of religion and God will dispense the blessing we are demanding

- d. But God is NEVER ANYONE'S DEBTOR!!

Romans 11:35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

- e. Our acts of religion are at best a small service rendered out of love to a God that has given us everything
- f. Look how God somewhat MINIMIZES the actions of their fasting

Isaiah 58:5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

- g. If we have sinned and God is disciplining or judging us because of our sins, our works of religion will never pay for those sins or put God in a position to OWE US kindness, forgiveness, mercy...

2. Even worse, these people were actually ADDING SIN TO SIN while they fasted
 - a. Their fasts were actually occasions of great acts of lovelessness toward one another
 - b. Look again what Isaiah said about their days of fasting and prayer:

Isaiah 58:3-4 "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. ⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

- c. These are issues of SOCIAL INJUSTICE... God is clearly judging people of power and influence... people who have workers who serve them
 - d. These are also issues of sinful anger and violence... they are fasting and are a little hungry and end up getting in arguments with each other, resulting in fistfights!!
3. God WILL NOT HEAR that kind of fasting and prayer!!

Isaiah 58:4 You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

D. A Present Danger for Religious Church Attenders Too

1. We Christians have our own religious machinery as well
 - a. We think that because we have been baptized and have joined a church and because we attend pretty faithfully, or even just occasionally, God should be happy to have us
 - b. We think that because we bow in prayer for grace before a meal or have some daily quiet time, that God owes us favor and blessing
2. We also make a few sacrifices in our lives and expect God to instantly answer some specific prayer... then we get angry if he doesn't
3. BEWARE this trust in religion!!
4. BEWARE of trusting in your habits and patterns and religious machinery... church attendance, putting up with sermons once a week, sacrificing sleeping in on Sunday
5. Remember the lessons of salvation in Christ... of broken-hearted humility, and of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone

Galatians 2:16 We know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Stop and evaluate yourself right now! Are you trusting in your religion or in Jesus to save you from your sins? Do you see that even your best works of religion need to be purified by the blood of Christ? Do you realize that God will never owe you any blessing EVER! That if God chooses to hear you when you fast and pray, that it is just by his grace!

Now, that doesn't at all mean that we shouldn't fast and pray... we should and MUST... but to do it humbly, mindful of the fact that God will never be obligated to us is essential!!

O dear friends, let us do EVER MORE works of religion... ever more works of fasting and prayer and worship and attendance and listening and singing... but let us NEVER TRUST in a single one for the forgiveness of our sins or our right standing before God

Now God lifts our minds and hearts to a whole different level... here he teaches us TRUE FASTING... the TRUE RELIGION he accepts... sacrificial loving service to the poor and needy

II. The True "Fast": Generous Justice (vs. 6-12)

A. The True "Fast": Denying Self to Serve Others (vs. 6-7)

Isaiah 58:6-7 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

1. God is redefining the religion of the Jews here... causing them to serve Him by serving others
2. He calls it a FAST because they are denying themselves... saying no to their fleshly drives and desires
3. But it is an energetic, bold, active fast... not merely LYING DOWN on a mat and being hungry
4. God has CHOSEN this kind of fasting as a way of showing their love for Him

B. Breaking the Chains of Oppression (vs. 6)

1. God starts with institutional injustice...

Isaiah 58:6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

2. Societal injustice is extremely difficult to combat... that's why God calls them CHAINS, CORDS, a YOKE

3. These hidden chains slip around people and guarantee poverty for them... they are working but not receiving wages; they are downtrodden and can't get a fair hearing by a judge, because he is part of the corrupt system

Isaiah 1:23 Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them.

4. Jesus in his days spoke of the teachers of the law who were dramatically religious but using their position to rob widows of their homes:

Mark 12:38-40 As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces,"³⁹ and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers.

5. How is there social injustice in our day? This is one of the most hotly debated issues of our time

- a. For Colin Kaepernick, quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers, the most pressing social issue of the day is law enforcement patterns with African-American young men...but for social activist Jim Brown, he says each of those cases need to be analyzed one at a time... the divide in America is deep and wide... if there is systemic injustice in law enforcement, it would clearly be addressed by our passage today... to LOOSE THE CHAINS of injustice
- b. For others it much more has to do with economic factors or educational factors; the cycle of poverty is like a chain around the hearts and futures of at-risk kids in urban settings all around the country... my friends, Thabiti Anyabwile and Matt Schmucker are pastoring a church in Washington, D.C. and have partnered with a local school that has had 24 principals in the past 22 years; they budget extra money for their faculty to entice people to come (such as they offer to pay off their school loans) because it is THAT DIFFICULT to attract and keep good teachers; the school building is run down, and the desperation level there is high

6. Perhaps the leading evangelical thinker on issues of social justice is Tim Keller... he's written a book called "Generous Justice"... and he does an excellent job defining justice and making it practical for us...
 - a. The Hebrew word for "justice" simply means doing what is right, what aligns with the character of God
 - b. For me, I think it means to love your neighbor as yourself... whenever God thinks you should love your neighbor as yourself, I don't think it's wrong to call that "doing justice"
 - c. It is NOT HELPFUL to think of it in terms of what each of us truly deserves before a holy God... in that case, "justice" for each of us sinners is death and eternal condemnation
 - d. BUT THAT'S VERTICAL, Godward... and not our concern here
 - e. "Justice" in the prophets always is HORIZONTAL... what one person owes another... what is right and fair and loving and aligns with the Second Great Commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself"
 - f. Keller focuses "doing justice" most especially in caring for the most vulnerable in society... in the Old Testament, the widows, the orphans, the aliens, the poor... the "QUARTET OF THE VULNERABLE"
 - g. In our context, we want to look at similar people... the vulnerable... those that are marginalized and don't have a voice
 - h. Christians should use whatever power they have—power of education, money, position, influence—to speak up for and better the earthly circumstances of the vulnerable
 - i. In our extremely politically and racially charged atmosphere, it seems very hard to do this in a way that is genuinely helpful and glorifies God
 - j. None of us is consistent in this... some folks emphasize the responsibility affluent, educated people have to "level the playing field" and use our influence to improve conditions for the poor, the immigrants, aliens, African-Americans, etc. and I think this is right
 - k. But those folks also have issues of injustice within their community as well... for me, the greatest injustice in America is abortion... before that, I think it is injustice for a young man to impregnate a woman and then flee his responsibilities to care for her and her child... this leave so many poor women as very young single parents, and it is the single greatest factor in the cycle of poverty we see in Urban America

- l. These issues are COMPLEX... but no one in America has as much truth to bear in these situations as the church... the church is the PILLAR and FOUNDATION of the truth
- m. And as we “loose the chains of injustice,” we are going to have a very potent platform for proclaiming the gospel... the church should care about ALL suffering, but especially ETERNAL SUFFERING!! The gospel delivers souls from hell... but people are much more likely to listen to its life-giving message from Christians who spend themselves on behalf of the needy

Keller gives many examples of “Generous Justice,” including a woman who was Heather, a highly educated lawyer who gave up a lucrative position in a corporate law firm to become an assistant DA in New York where so many of the criminals she prosecutes have been exploiting the poor, particularly poor women

Another example Keller gave was of a young man he knew named Mark Gornik, who moved with his wife to Sandtown, one of the poorest and most dangerous neighborhoods in Baltimore; for decades, white people had fled Sandtown – he was the first to move BACK INTO that community, and he did it for the sake of the gospel. He said “the police thought I was a drug dealer, and the drug dealers thought I was a police officer. So for a while there, I didn’t know who was going to shoot me first!” But Mark worked with other community leaders and planted a church that has a flourishing set of comprehensive ministries that have transformed that neighborhood for Christ.

Heather and Mark were willing to lay themselves out for “generous justice,” for the most marginalized, poorest, most vulnerable members of society

C. Feeding the Hungry, Housing the Homeless (vs. 7)

1. The Isaiah text goes beyond issues of justice to addressing basic human needs as well... food and housing

Isaiah 58:7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

2. Meeting these needs has been foundational to biblical justice throughout the Scriptures
3. God says to NOT TURN AWAY from your own flesh and blood... remember that you are just as they are... HUMAN, descended from Adam, needing food and shelter just as they do

4. The “turning away” is that willful ignorance that causes us to refuse to absorb the needs

D. The True Sacrifice: Spend Yourself, Not Merely Your Money (vs. 10)

1. No text of scripture gets so deeply to the issue of sacrificial ministry to the poor and needy as this one

Isaiah 58:10 if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

2. Spend YOURSELVES in behalf of the hungry and needy... it requires personal involvement... not just writing a check or throwing someone some money

Spending yourself is just like this:

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

- a. So many examples abound... that when Christians get PERSONALLY INVOLVED in the lives of needy people, their hearts get transformed
- b. John Wesley’s whole view of money was changed for the rest of his life when he personally visited a debtor’s prison; he looked at these ordinary people in this debtor’s prison, locked up until they should repay their debts, but unable to do so from prison... NO ESCAPE... and he realized that he could free some of them with a few copper coins he had on his person
- c. Thomas Chalmers, rector of St. John’s parish in Glasgow from 1819 to 1823

Came to a powerful conclusion:

“People got by when other people took a personal interest in them.”

“Effective help in the cities as in the countryside, had to be personal; those who were better off were to *suffer with* the troubled.”

- d. This is Christ-like, incarnational, effective, intelligent; but this is UNSPEAKABLY COSTLY too

William Ruffner, Pastor of Seventh Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, wrote in 1853: “To cast a contribution into the box brought to the hand, or to attend committees and meetings, are very trifling exercises of Christian self-denial and devotion, compared with what is demanded in long weary walks through the

street, the contact with filth, and often with rude and repulsive people, the facing of disease and distress, and all manner of heart-rending and heart frightening scenes, and all the trials of faith, patience, and hope, which are incident to the duty we urge.”

E. Tim Keller and Generous Justice

1. Keller argues that, in the West, we tend to think of justice as “individual rights”... freeing up sovereign individuals from all constraints so they can do whatever their hearts desire, no matter what others may say
2. That is not biblical justice... biblical justice is much more captured by a Hebrew word “shalom”... deeper, richer, fuller than “peace,” it is a whole system of wellness in which every aspect of life is working together in a right relationship to the others... wholeness, oneness... SHALOM

Keller: God created the world to be a fabric, for everything to be woven together and interdependent. ...

“The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in equity, fulfillment, and delight” – [this] is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We translate it “peace,” but in the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight. It describes a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts are faithfully and fruitfully employed, all under the arc of God’s love.

Here’s an illustration of shalom: If I threw a thousand threads onto the table they wouldn’t be a fabric. They’d just be threads laying on top of each other. Threads become a fabric when each one has been woven over, under, around, and through every other one. The more interdependent they are, the more beautiful they are. The more interwoven they are, the stronger and warmer they are. God made the world with billions of entities, but He didn’t make them to be an aggregation. Rather, He made them to be in a beautiful, harmonious, knitted, webbed, interdependent relationship with each other.

Physically, when your body’s working properly, every part works with all the others. But if you have cancer, it means a part of your body is at odds with the others. You experience the unraveling of physical shalom.

Psychologically, your inner psyche has various parts: thoughts, feelings, and reason. When they’re working together you experience inner shalom, peace. But when your feelings crave something that troubles your conscience, you experience guilt. Which means you experience the unraveling of psychological shalom. Financially, when people have money, resources, and advantages, when they plunge them into the human community – so the parks are great and the schools are great and

the houses are great – you have a strong social fabric. You experience social shalom. But when the wealthy ignore the less fortunate, when they hold onto everything, the social fabric unravels.

Notice that justice is depicted as sharing food with the hungry. The Hebrew commentators point out that this literally means to wait on the hungry. It's not saying to give money so somebody else can serve the food. It says, literally, to serve the poor. That's what it means to do justice. It means taking the threads of your life – your emotions, your time, your body, your physical presence, your money – and plunging them into the lives of other people through thousands of involvements.

Fabric, threads, involvements—over, under, around, and through—that's how you do justice. And notice the logic, notice how verse six talks about loosing the chains of injustice and dealing with the oppressed—and then it says to share your food. If you don't share, you're not only stingy, you're unjust. A lot of people in Western countries say, "Wait a minute, you're telling me that if I'm not giving, I'm being unjust? How could that be?"

Here's an illustration. In New York, and in all the cities around the country, children are growing up in communities where – given their family circumstances and their school situation – they're functionally illiterate. By the time they're 15, 16, 17 they can't read or write. When you get to that age and you can't read, you're ruined for the market, you're ruined when it comes to economic and social flourishing. You're locked into poverty for the rest of your life. That's happening to hundreds of thousands of people in New York city right now. Why?

The liberal analysis says it's because of unjust social structures. The conservative analysis says it's because of the breakdown of the family. But nobody says it's the kids' fault. Nobody says that a 7- or 8-year-old is supposed to think: "I need to move to a better school district." No 7- or 8-year-old is supposed to think: "My parents are guilty of malpractice." Nobody says that 7-year-olds need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. And yet, a child born into my family has a 300 to 400 times greater chance for economic and social flourishing than the kids in those neighborhoods. That's just one example of the way in which the fabric of this world – the shalom of this world – has been broken. If I don't share the advantages that this unjust world has dealt me, that in itself is unjust, isn't it?

This verse calls us to THIS KIND OF SOCIAL ACTION!! To spend ourselves on behalf of the poor!!

F. Active Mercy Ministry is a Powerful Platform AND Incentive for Gospel Proclamation

1. Cross Conference, 2013... spoke on the Union of Mercy ministry and Evangelism

Conference motto: O Lord, help us to care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering!

2. The alleviating of temporary physical suffering is great... but the deliverance of souls from eternal suffering in hell is infinitely greater... the two of them GO TOGETHER!!
3. In the New Testament, both Jesus and the Apostles used their ability to do healings to attract crowds of people to whom they would then preach the gospel

Matthew 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Acts 3:11-13 While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.

Acts 8:6-8 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

4. The mercy ministry was a POWERFUL PLATFORM for the gospel... it drew crowds and gave ample opportunities to address the true spiritual needs of the people
5. So in church history, the compassion of evangelists and missionaries to address physical needs attracted powerful notice for the gospel... it also spurred on evangelists into ever wider circles of ministry
6. Perhaps one of the greatest examples in church history of how a man pursuing the glory of God and the spread of the gospel first and mercy ministry second found his compassion for the poor being the PERFECT VEHICLE for the spread of the gospel was GEORGE MUELLER
7. Mueller is known for his amazing ministry to orphans...

He built five large orphan houses and cared for 10,024 orphans in his life. When he started in 1834 there were accommodations for 3,600 orphans in all of England and twice that many children under eight were in prison. One of the great effects

of Mueller's ministry was to inspire others so that "fifty years after Mueller began his work, at least one hundred thousand orphans were cared for in England alone." [<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/george-muellers-strategy-for-showing-god>]

8. But what is not so well known is 1) his motive for getting into orphan ministry to begin with and 2) how that ministry became a perfect platform for him to PREACH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST!!

The three chief reasons for establishing an Orphan-House are: 1. That God may be glorified, should He be pleased to furnish me with the means, in its being seen that it is not a vain thing to trust in Him; and that thus the faith of His children may be strengthened. 2. The spiritual welfare of fatherless and motherless children. 3. Their temporal welfare

NOTE the order!!! Mueller knew that God must come FIRST, souls of humans SECOND, temporal needs THIRD...

G. The Lavish Rewards of Serving the Needy (vs. 8-12)

Isaiah 58:8-10 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, ¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

1. God promises that people who live like this will SHINE RADIANTLY with his glory... spiritual glory now, physical glory in heaven
2. God promises HEALING for such people as well... healed from soul-sicknesses such as selfishness, lust, pride, covetousness... also healed from many physical diseases that go with that kind of sinful living
3. Our righteousness will go before us, and the Lord will be our rear guard... a life of amazing protection from evil and leadership from the Lord
4. We will call on the Lord and he will actually HEAR us in our prayers, as he heard Mueller in his 50,000 answers to prayer
5. Our light will rise in the darkness... we will really be the LIGHT OF THE WORLD and a CITY ON A HILL... people will flock to us to know the Lord that has so powerfully led us
6. Look at the rich spiritual prosperity:

Isaiah 58:11-12 The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. ¹² Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

There are LAVISH REWARDS promised for those who will invest themselves in mercy ministry... for those who will SPEND THEMSELVES in behalf of the poor and needy; this is a prime opportunity for FBC to see lives transformed in this community of Durham

III. Applications

A. Come to Christ

1. Religion cannot save you... only faith in Christ can!!
2. Trust in Christ for your salvation!

B. Understand Generous Justice: Spend Yourself on behalf of the poor

1. Ask the Lord to open your heart to mercy ministry
2. Isaiah 58:10 searches us ALL for the rest of our lives... we are called on to SPEND OURSELVES on behalf of the needy

Ask yourself: in what way do you sacrifice TIME, ENERGY, and MONEY for the needy? Perhaps you don't believe in giving to a street person, because he might squander the money on alcohol or drugs; perhaps you don't know anyone else you might invest yourself in... but the text implies that if you don't in some way sacrifice yourself for the needy, you are failing to do justice

3. Ask God to show you issues of SHALOM... not just chains of injustice like slavery but ways you can enrich the lives of others that are poor and needy
4. There are no easy answers... but find ways to reach out to others...
5. Start with the ministries our church offers
 - a. Many of our members are actively involved in urban ministry in the immediate areas around the church
 - b. Every Wednesday, some of our folks go out and connect with young African-American men—playing sports, doing bible studies, talking about biblical manhood themes—1) sharing the gospel with them; 2) teaching issues like sexual purity, how to honor women, how to do well in school and maximize their potential for the glory of God

- c. We also have folks that have been doing ministry at Liberty Street on Tuesdays for years... reaching out to younger kids and their parents
- d. Nathan Mah has been actively involved in ministry to refugees... we've mentioned that before, but this is clearly an issue of caring for the VULNERABLE in our midst... you can get involved at various levels
- e. We have the Caring Center that makes low-cost goods available to members of the community on Saturday mornings
- f. Our International Connections ministry does English as a Second Language (ESL) classes on Wednesday evenings... and there are a host of other ministry opportunities that cluster around our developed ministry to Internationals

6. Beyond these, Tim Keller offers some basic ways to do justice:

Keller's Ideas: Do you have tool that others often do not have? Offer it to others. Go to the elderly couple on the corner and offer to till their garden this spring. Is there some kind of neighborhood social action you could render? For example, try taking an opinion poll about the heavy traffic on your street, and discuss what the neighbors could do about it together. Can you find some natural way to give gifts? Buy too many bedding plants or too many tickets to the big game. Make too much bread, or plant too many tomatoes in the garden. Then take the extras to your neighbors, to the folks at work, or to people in the church with whom you are trying to cultivate a friendship.

Is there some specific service you could render? You could offer the elderly lady in your neighborhood transportation to the market. You could offer free baby-sitting to a single parent. You could notice a neighbor starting to build a shed or doing some painting, and offer to help. Watch especially for crisis situations and be there to offer help.

Perhaps all of the above suggestions seem rather obvious. We do these things naturally to make friends. But keep in mind, most people only work to cultivate relationships with people they *like*, with people they enjoy being with. Christian ministries of mercy are unique in that they intentionally and systematically seek to build bridges with all the people around them at home, at work, and at church. They do this to discover needs and to create a climate in which others can share their weaknesses.