

**Impractical Presents: Giving for and to God by Giving to Others (Prov. 14:31) – Chris Altrock – December 6, 2009**

Last Monday some of Highland's staff and elders prayerfully drove through the 11 neighborhoods within two miles of our new facility. This was part of an ongoing effort to learn more about the new neighborhood. Afterwards, I stopped by the Hatcher's new home, just minutes away from the new facility. As they gave me the tour of their home, I remembered the first time Kendra and I purchased a home. What I most remember is sitting in someone's office signing document after document after document. And what I most remember about the documents is the financial numbers. They were the largest financial numbers ever attached to my name! And they made me nervous! Like many of you, the first home we purchased was not something we could afford with our own resources. We had to ask an institution for a loan. That institution possessed greater resources than we did and was able to fund our need.

Institutions that provide loans are a vital part of our economy. Those institutions and their loans can get out of hand. Still, they provide a much needed service. They make possible important projects—like our new facility, and purchases—like a car that we could not afford with our own resources.

Proverbs allows us to see that loans and resourcing institutions are also a part of the spiritual world. Let's listen to Prov. 19:17: *17 Those who are kind to the poor lend to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done (Prov. 19:17 TNIV)*. Here is a literal translation: *"Those who are gracious to the poor lend to Yahweh, and he will fully repay them."*<sup>1</sup> The proverb states that when you give to the poor, you are making a loan to God. In other words, God will repay what you gave to the poor.<sup>2</sup> Here's a simple way of imagining this: person A is poor; person B has resources and gives some resources to person A; but person A cannot repay what was given; so God assumes person A's indebtedness; and God then repays person B; now person B has resources which he can use to help others like person A. And on and on it goes.

The scene raises an interesting question: Why doesn't God just provide the resources directly to person A? Why does God use a middle man like person B? Why give the resources to person B and then have person B pass them on to person A? Why not just give directly to person A? In answering that question we quickly learn why this proverb is not advocating a "health and wealth" gospel. The proverb is not promising, "If you give to the poor God will make you rich." No, the proverb is about something much larger. The proverb is about God's divine economy. God has created an economy in which the needs of the poor are filled indirectly—through the hands of kind people to whom he's given the resources. God uses us, the middle man, because he wants us to play a role in his economy. And that places a great responsibility upon us.

That day Kendra and I sat down to purchase our first home, there was a loan officer who had been authorized to give the money from the financial institution to us. What if turned to us and said, "I'm sorry. I'm not going to give you the money. I'll keep it. I've been wanting a new car, and a bigger home, and a vacation. I'm going to use the money myself." That would have been ludicrous! It was his job to pass the money from the financial institution to us. That was his

role. In a similar way, that's our role. God has blessed many of us with resources. It is our responsibility to pass at least some of that along to those in need. That's how God's economy works. *We actually give for God when we give to the poor.* God wants to give to the poor. So he gives us resources which we then give to the poor. When we give, it's God's giving through us. We give for God when we give to the poor.

One more proverb gives us a peek into God's economy. Listen to Prov. 14:31: *31 Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.* The proverb has something negative to say: Because God made the poor, to attack the poor is to attack the one who made them. When we oppress the poor, we "show contempt" for God, meaning we denigrate his significance or worth.<sup>3</sup> That is, when we treat the poor as worthless, we treat their Maker as worthless. But the proverb also makes a positive statement: to show kindness to the poor is to honor the one who made them.<sup>4</sup> To "honor" God means to give God weight.<sup>5</sup> It means we consider him valuable. We show how much God means to us by the way we treat the poor. *We give honor to God when we give resources to the poor.*

Both proverbs reveal that God has a central role in a divine economy. On God's side, he wants to provide resources for the poor. So, he gives those resources to kind people who, in turn, pass them along to the poor. And on our side, we want to give honor to God, to demonstrate in how important God is to us. We do this by showing kindness to the poor. We give for God when we give to the poor. And we give honor to God when we give resources to the poor.

Our ministries to the poor allow us to live out these proverbs. Today we will hear how we are giving to the poor through HopeWorks, Agape, and Memphis Urban Ministry. Our guests this morning include Ron Wade, director of Hope Works, David Jordan director of Agape, and Dorn Muscar, Outreach Minister for Memphis Urban Ministry.

How we are giving to the unemployed – **Ron Wade** (4-5 minutes)

How we are giving to the homeless and hurting – **David Jordan** (4-5 minutes)

How we are giving to the poor – **Dorn Muscar** (4-5 minutes)

One way to give to the poor is to give our prayer-time. We've produced an insert in Link which will guide you all week in praying for these ministries. Tonight at 5 PM we'll kick off this week of prayer at a special prayer service for these ministries. But we also want to give in a tangible way. That's why next Sunday we are asking you to give \$148,000. That's six times our normal Sunday morning contribution. But we need that to fund ministries like these to the poor. Why are they so important? Because when we give to the poor, we give honor to God and we actually give for God.

Let's close by praying for these ministries: "Prayer for Urban Missions" – **Jerry Honea**

---

<sup>1</sup> Tremper Longman III, Proverbs Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Baker Academic, 2007), 369.

<sup>2</sup> Longman, 369.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Eerdmans, 2004), 607.

<sup>4</sup> Longman, 308.

<sup>5</sup> Waltke, 607.