

Jimmy Dorrell: Concern for the poor permeates the Bible

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HOUSTON—God’s special concern for the poor permeates the Law, the Prophets and the New Testament, said Jimmy Dorrell, co-founder of Mission Waco and pastor of the Church Under the Bridge.

“There are more than 2,000 verses in the Bible about the poor. And yet, people can go to Sunday school and church for years and never hear them,” Dorrell told a workshop during the No Need Among You Conference in Houston. The [Texas Christian Community Development Network](#) sponsored the Oct. 6-8 event.

Genesis makes it clear all people—including the poorest and most marginalized—possess inherent dignity because they are created in God’s image.

“The image of God is imprinted on who they are,” Dorrell said.

Broken world, broken systems

But Genesis also teaches that due to human sin, God’s good creation has been marred and broken, he added.

“We live in a broken world. And not only is the world broken, but the systems in it are broken,” he said.

Both the Levitical Holiness Code and the Deuteronomic Code include laws that provide for and protect the poor and vulnerable, he noted.

“The Law is clearly on the side of the poor,” he said.

God gave the Law to the Hebrew people not only to govern their actions, but also to teach them they could “never be good enough” to overcome what sin had broken, apart from God’s intervention, Dorrell emphasized.

All people—regardless of material wealth or poverty—suffer the effects of sin and fallenness, and that should make God’s people humble and teachable, he stressed.

“We come to minister in our brokenness, ministering to brothers and sisters who are broken in another way,” Dorrell said. “The poor have things to teach us.”

Justice for the vulnerable

The eighth century Hebrew prophets emphasized justice as a reflection of God’s character, he continued. The prophets called for fair treatment of the poor and the most vulnerable—widows, orphans and immigrants—and they pushed back against injustice and unjust systems.

The Hebrew prophets also challenged God’s people to practice generosity, he said.

“We are blessed to bless. How you spend your money is a symbol of your faith,” Dorrell said.

While the word translated “justice” appears more than 200 times in the Old Testament, that specific word almost disappears in the New Testament. However, the word translated into English as “righteousness” carries a similar meaning, he noted.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught both by word and example God’s special concern for the poor and the outcasts. Rather than isolating himself from those whom others considered unclean, Jesus welcomed the ostracized and marginalized, Dorrell stressed.

“Jesus touched the poor and the lepers, and he hung out with tax collectors and sinners. He was in the mix,” Dorrell said.

In messiness, ‘the kingdom breaks in’

Love for one another and sharing possessions with each other characterized the early church, he observed. Like Jesus, the early disciples did not fear touching the unloved and connecting with those whom others neglected.

“Today, we have moved away from the poor. We have to worker harder to connect—to touch and be touched,” Dorrell said.

Reflecting on his own experiences working with the unhoused, Dorrell said about one-third of the people who attend the Church Under the Bridge have some form of mental illness.

“It’s messy stuff, working with the poor. But in the craziness of what looks like disorder, the kingdom breaks in,” he said.

“If we are going to change the world, the poor have to be involved in it. I have learned more about the kingdom of God from broken people than I ever learned in seminary.”