

Speaking to the soul



Poverty

Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to poverty will be cursed. Proverbs 28:27

The book of Proverbs has a great deal to say about fools. Time and again, the writer notes how stupid, ignorant and destructive they are. Many of his observations would be incredibly funny if they weren't so serious and sad. In Proverbs 26, he wrote: "A proverb in the mouth of a fool is as useless as a paralysed leg...like a thorny branch brandished by a drunk" and "an employer who hires a fool... is like an archer who shoots at random" (Proverbs 26:7,9 and 10).

The writer of Proverbs often refers to poverty. In his society, there was no welfare state, so poverty was an ever-present and terrible threat. If their family was unable to give support, a person could become totally destitute. Begging would be the only option. It's not surprising that many proverbs speak of the vital importance of giving to the poor, and in chapter 19 the writer speaks of the spiritual significance of such giving. He writes: "If you help the poor, you are lending to the LORD – and he will repay you" (Proverbs 19:17). God loves to see people who are generous to the poor, and this theme runs through the whole Bible, from the law of Moses to the sharp and down-to-earth wisdom of the letter of James. God expects us to care for the poor and will reward those who do so.

The reference to those who close their eyes to poverty strikes me with particular force. The writer bluntly states that they will be cursed. God is clearly calling us to open our eyes to the reality of poverty, uncomfortable as that may be. Poverty is never pleasant, and it is very easy for those who are financially secure to get on with their comfortable lives in blissful ignorance of those who are struggling through financial need.

The statistics are terrifying. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has been working for over a century to study the causes of poverty in the UK. It believes that more than 20 per cent of the population lives in poverty, and this affects every part of people's lives – their children's education, their health, their job prospects, their life span – everything. It is particularly painful to note that more than half of those who live in poverty are disabled or live in a family with someone who is disabled. This is a crisis which demands a response from all of us.

QUESTION

How aware are you of poverty in your area, and what can you do to help?

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for all the resources you have given me. Help me to be increasingly generous in sharing them with others, especially the poor. Amen

