**A Sermon for DaySpring**

**By Jeremy Everett**

**February 11, 2018**

***Remember Me When You Come into Your Kingdom***

***(I was Hungry)***

***Matthew 25: 31-46***

***31****“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.****32****All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,****33****and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.****34****Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;****35****for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,****36****I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’****37****Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?****38****And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?****39****And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’****40****And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,[*[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+25&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24046g)*] you did it to me.’****41****Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;****42****for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,****43****I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’****44****Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’****45****Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’****46****And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” [[1]](#endnote-1)*

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1. **Transfiguration Sunday**
2. I can **totally identify with Peter**. I can see him up on the mountain blown away watching Jesus talk to Elijah and Moses, and having the aha moment, saying to Jesus, **“How about I build you guys a mountain retreat center**…we’ll call it **The Center for Prophetic Spirituality**. We can host retreats and seminars and **talk about the enneagram**. It’ll be awesome.”
3. Then I can imagine Jesus laughing and shaking his head saying… **“Peter that is totally something an 8 would say**. But it is time for us to **go back to the desert** **valley**…we have more work to do there…”

My name is Jeremy Everett also an enneagram 8. Some of you may know me from my work with the Texas Hunger Initiative but most of you know me as Amy’s husband.

1. **Chicken Bones**

…A few years ago, Congress established the National Commission on Hunger to find ways that the United States could more effectively address the issue of hunger, and I was lucky enough to be a part of this group. In order to best understand the issue, we traveled to communities across the country to hear directly from people. One trip took us to the **west Texas desert**, where we sat down with a **group of elders.** This particular group met each other in a **citizenship class** they were taking. Most of them had lived and worked in the United States their entire lives, they raised their children here—many of whom enlisted to serve in the military and were in the Middle East on active duty as we spoke. **They were not rapists or drug smugglers**. They had been **business owners**, **welders**, and **car mechanics**, and their one wish was to **die as U.S. citizens**.

Along with their desire for citizenship, the elders had another thing in common…they **were all experiencing hunger**. Many of the men had been injured on jobs but received no worker’s compensation because they weren’t U.S. citizens. The women were older and the money they earned working throughout their childhoods’ as laborers in the fields, then as custodians in hotels, did not include retirement benefits.

At one point towards the end of our conversation, I asked them pointedly, “**do you have any food to eat?**” Hearing this question, one proud, elderly man with a chiseled chin and a sharp mustache, simply buried his head in his hands and began to weep. His wife sat up, straightened her dress then spoke, “Occasionally we are able to put food on the table. When we do it is normally one meal a day. I will make us a plate of beans and a couple of tortillas…we are older now, so we don’t need as much.”

The rest of the group had avoided eye contact with me when I asked the question hoping that I would not call on them. But when the elderly woman spoke they listened intently and nodded in agreement as if she were speaking for all of them. When she finished, her husband raised his head, wiped his tears away, and said,

**“Remember us, when you come into your kingdom.”**

I immediately had to excuse myself and find a private place. I found a bathroom, closed the door, and I wept uncontrollably. I kept thinking of the chant we sing, “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”

As many times as I have sung that song or read those words I have never imagined myself living in a kingdom. I have always thought about it only related to Jesus and heaven. This man’s comment flipped these words for me. After all, he was preparing to leave our discussion and go back to the isolation many elderly in our nation experience to a home with very little food. I would leave and return to our nice hotel, eat a nice meal, then to the halls of power in Washington to deliver our report.

The following day, we went back to the community center where we were scheduled to hear nearly ten hours of testimony from specific individuals invited to speak and then from anyone who wanted to have their voice heard.

A few hours in, we heard the story of one of his public health workers, **Linda[[2]](#endnote-2),** and her visit to homes in the colonias.

If you’re not familiar with **colonias**, it may be difficult for you to grasp the **living conditions** that they present. These particular colonias in west Texas sit on the far edges of the city, sprawling in the middle of the desert. Often they do not have running water or electricity, much less paved roads. Homes in the colonias tend to be built with the materials at hand, and it is not uncommon to see a one room home with one wall made of corrugated metal, another plywood, and another of rocks salvaged from the surrounding land. Property in colonias is typically not owned by the resident but leased from a landowner who may **“come and take it,”** whenever they please.

On one of Linda’s visits she met Maria. Maria lived in a colonia that occasionally had electricity, and Linda met with her to see how she was doing. After brief introductions, Linda began asking her survey of questions regarding the health of Maria’s family. For her final question Linda asked a similar question to the one I asked the day before, **“Maria, do you have any food in the house?”** “Hearing the question, Maria’s head slowly lowered under the weight of shame and guilt—without saying a word, Maria stood up and guided Linda to her kitchen and pointed to a small refrigerator. Linda stepped forward and opened it and saw that it was completely empty apart from **one little bag of chicken bones**. Puzzled Linda asked Maria, **“Why is there a bag of chicken bones inside your fridge?”** Through choked-down tears Maria responded, “**So that when my children open the refrigerator door they will at least see that something is there.”**

Surely, we can do better than this?!

Our commission was sent across the country to try to identify the root causes of hunger and find out what we can do as a nation to improve lives. What we discovered was not a surprise. For most people their lack of access to food was a direct result of their lack of access to money. However, their lack of access to money was often contextual. For the people in the desert, it was their lack of citizenship that resulted in low wages which kept them food insecure.

**“Remember us, when you come into your kingdom.”**

1. **Matthew 25**

Most Christians are probably familiar with Jesus’ teachings, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36**I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

This is the only apocalyptic scene in Matthew and Jesus was painting a picture of a very different type of kingdom.[[3]](#endnote-3) Jesus the King has returned and He is sitting on the podium this time. This is the final hearing, all people are gathered, and Jesus begins separating them… the sheep and the goats, the righteous and the accused.[[4]](#endnote-4) To the astonishment of the people gathered, the criterion for judgement is not confession of faith in Christ. Nothing is said of grace, justification, or the forgiveness of sins. Instead, what matters is whether or not a person has acted with love and cared for the needy. These acts are not just “extra credit,” but constitute the decisive criterion for judgment[[5]](#endnote-5). Essentially, when the people respond or fail to respond to human need, they are in fact responding, or failing to respond, to Christ.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The calling of the faithful is clear: **Feed the hungry and you will live.**

Regretfully, we have not lived up to it. 40 million people in the United States live in poverty.[[7]](#endnote-7) 13 million of them are children.[[8]](#endnote-8) 4.6 million are senior adults.[[9]](#endnote-9) 41 million Americans are considered food insecure,[[10]](#endnote-10) the term we use when describing hunger.[[11]](#endnote-11) And every county in the U.S. has reported food insecurity among a percentage of their population.[[12]](#endnote-12)

1. **Scapegoats**

We have scapegoated the poor to justify not living up to our calling. To scapegoat and push the poor out of our minds, we’ve had to **dehumanize** them. We have worked hard to **classify the poor as lazy**, to divide them as deserving and undeserving. We have developed theologies of prosperity to lift those who are rich in order to demonize those who are poor.

Thus, it becomes **morally defensible for some children to have an abundance of food while others have a bag of chicken bones in the fridge.** We can just blame the parent for being **lazy or an illegal**.

And we create the **Welfare Queen** who lives off government programs, drives a **Cadillac**, owns an **iPhone** and **a big screen TV** all while eating **lobster** paid for by **food stamps** funded by **hard working American tax payers like me** who receive no such benefits from the **overreaching federal government**. We make “the welfare queen” emblematic of ALL people in poverty. The welfare queen is completely undeserving of compassion and is a construct of her own making. This justifies our casting her out as our scapegoat into the desert to die.

1. **So Who are the Hungry?**
2. **Josie and the Plight of Underemployment**

People often experience hunger in our nation for a variety of reasons. It’s primarily episodic,[[13]](#endnote-13) meaning that people who experience hunger may not experience it daily. More than likely they experience it at the end of a pay period.[[14]](#endnote-14) The first and most prevalent reason for hunger is **underemployment**. Basically, many people who are experiencing hunger have jobs and are working, but their jobs don’t pay enough to cover all of their living expenses—even when they’re putting together as many jobs as they can find to try and make ends meet. When we lived in San Antonio, our neighbors would often find minimum wage jobs in the hospitality industry servicing restaurants and hotels catering to vacationers. They would supplement those jobs with additional jobs at a fast food restaurant, convenient store, or anything else they could find.

Our neighbor **Josie**, lived in a duplex next door. Her husband suffered from kidney disease and had to walk to a dialysis clinic a mile away from their home--everyday. Josie was legally blind. So every morning a bus would arrive shortly after 5 AM to pick her up and take her to the Lighthouse for the Blind where she worked. She and her blind coworkers made army fatigues for the troops in Iraq. When her shift was over she would catch the same bus and return home each evening at 6:00. On weekends, she would use her walking stick to find her way down the street to one of our local restaurants where she would sweep the floors for extra cash. Compounding the problem of poverty for women, they are currently paid 81% of what their male counterparts are paid.[[15]](#endnote-15)

1. **Education**

A second reason people experience hunger in our nation is directly tied to educational achievement.

One of my coworkers, **Doug**, was mentoring a high school student early in his career as a social worker. The student, **Michael**, was achieving the goals that he and Doug set forth from the beginning of the school year…until late in the spring. At that point, Michael began failing his courses. Doug asked Michael, why are you failing? Michael responded, If I can fail at least one course then I am guaranteed to go to summer school. **If I go to summer school then I will at least get one meal a day this summer.”**

Doug’s heart broke. His student was trading his future for food. The fact is, 1 in 4 children are food insecure in Texas.

Hunger and education can quickly become a vicious cycle. A person needs to have an education in order to have the best chance of not living in poverty, but living in poverty is a detriment to getting an education. In fact, some of the most important predictors of high school graduation are reading level at third grade, family poverty, family structure, and living in an impoverished neighborhood.[[16]](#endnote-16) Hunger often contributes to higher dropout rates, grade repetition, and special education.[[17]](#endnote-17)

Simply put, **you must** graduate from high school and get an additional degree to get out of hunger and poverty in the 21st Century, but being hungry and in poverty makes it much more difficult to graduate from high school and get an additional degree. There are always exceptions, but if you are not the exception your chances of living in poverty and experiencing hunger increase dramatically with a lack of educational attainment.

1. **Race and Ethnicity**

On top of all that, **race and ethnicity** play a major role in high rates of hunger in our nation, exacerbating the reasons listed so far. People of color are almost **twice** as likely to experience hunger in our nation.[[18]](#endnote-18) Whether or not we want to admit it, **we have not healed our wounds of racism.** We **have had** our **moments of triage**—abolishing slavery and the Civil Rights Movement—which were critical steps to slowing the **hemorrhaging flow of racist hatred, bigotry, and indifference** that were pervasive in our history. But **we have not taken steps towards healing** on a national level. We did not honor our commitment to reparations or put together a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We have not integrated our neighborhoods, **our churches**, or social groups. As a result, we are still dealing with racist outbursts all over our country and people in minority households still cope with hunger and poverty to a greater degree than those in white households.

1. **Additional Causes**

These, of course, are not all the root causes of hunger, but they are some of the most prevalent.

Naturally we hear a lot about the person who does not take **personal responsibility for themselves** and is thus hungry and living in poverty. This is certainly a problem but much less of one than we have been led to believe. In my two decades of living and working in impoverished conditions I can affirm that these folks do exist but they are the exceptions of the impoverished population.

What is consistent for people experiencing hunger is they are forced to make **tradeoffs** each month. They are forced to decide whether to pay their rent, a car payment, electricity bill, or buy food. Food is often the one negotiable item. If people don’t pay their electricity bill, their power is cut off. If they don’t pay rent, they are kicked out of their home. But, if they don’t by food they’ll just be hungry. Yes, not having food leads to less productivity at work and school, increases mental health decline, and causes shame, but you keep your home. So, people make tradeoffs to get by.



1. **Signs of Hope in Deserted Places**

But just like we read throughout Scripture, there is hope found in deserted places. The desert is where Jesus fed the 5,000, it is where Isaac found water, and Moses received manna from heaven. It is also where:



1. **Jesus and the community of Anthony fed 4,000 children** a day in the sparsely populated west Texas desert. Jesus reached out to my colleagues at the Texas Hunger Initiative because the children in his community did not have food to eat during the summer months. He and his school district wanted to do something, but they had very little money and their students were spread out all over much of the rugged west Texas landscape. Our THI team was excited to come alongside Jesus. We enlisted faculty and students from Baylor to help us. With Jesus at the helm, our team discovered that by partnering with USDA’s summer meal program, hiring students from the high school to make meals, and utilizing one bus for transportation…we could make meals twice a day, put the student workers in pairs, and the bus could drop them off at parks, baseball fields, churches, and rec centers. Once the bus dropped off all the pairs of students with coolers full of food, it would go back and pick them all up, giving each group of students approximately two hours to provide meals to children. The bus would then return to the school and pick up the second shift. Then do it all over again for an evening meal.

In so doing, Jesus and his students served 4,000 children every day in the desert. Not to make a comparison, but **Jesus fed the 5,000 once…Jesus did it every day**!



This is a model we have scaled at **THI,** leading to an increase of **100 million additional meals to Texas children every year.**

1. Similarly, **two Sunday school teachers** in a church in Texas’ Concho Valley were moved when they learned that several of their communities’ manufacturing plants closed, resulting in 8,000 children on the free and reduced lunch program, and those children would not have access to the same meals during the summer.

So these women took action--organizing the churches with commercial kitchens to make meals, non-profits and city parks to host summer meals sites, and businesses to volunteer with the children to keep their minds active throughout the summer improving their chances of academic success the following school year.

After a few months of planning and a lot of grit, these women led the churches of their community to take up an offering in the spring that ended up providing **20,000 meals to the children** of their community in the summer of 2010. And they have done it every summer since.

**Jesus** and these women took steps of **faith** despite their community being in a deserted place during tough economic conditions. **And their faith bore literal fruit for the poor**. They modeled citizenship in the kingdom of God.

1. This year, I became a senior fellow with World Hunger Relief, known to most of us as **‘the farm’**--where Amy and I did internships more than 15 years ago. They recently made a commitment not only to educate people domestically and globally about how to end hunger…but they also made a commitment to do something about it in Waco. Through a partnership facilitated by **Dale and Lauren Barron**, the **farm began growing veggies that would be given to patients** at the Family Health Center when doctors prescribed healthy foods to patients who were in dietary need.

So far, nearly **2,000 boxes of fresh, organically-raised, locally-grown produce** have been given to impoverished Wacoans, and thanks to believers in the program like Dayspring, we will double the program in the spring!

1. **Conclusion: The Sheep and (Scape) Goats**
2. Our economic hardships are not evenly spread out among society. Rather, it is the same family struggling with bouts of hunger that also does not have affordable health care. It is the same family sending their children to schools where graduation rates are well below 50% and college readiness is in the single digits. It is the same family that have lacked livable wage paying jobs for generations. They are our scapegoats, sent to live in deserted urban neighborhoods and rural trailer parks we avoid.
3. But this practice is antithetical to the scripture we read in Matthew. After all, the scapegoats in Matthew are those that did not see the hungry and give them food. The ones that did not provide shelter for the stranger, or clothing for the naked.
4. Instead, Matthew calls us not only to see the hungry as humans, but to see the hungry as Jesus. [[19]](#endnote-19)
5. But we are not meant to walk this path alone. Peter must have realized this later in his ministry to the Church…his time on the mountain top with Jesus, Elijah, and Moses, was at least in part to remind him that the saints of history are walking with him…and they are walking with us.

So together we repent for our collective scapegoating, our indifference, our lack of trust in God when we too are in deserted places.

Together, we remember our brothers and sisters in poverty who live as strangers in our kingdoms.

And together we will put flesh on the words of Jesus:

“For I was hungry… and you gave me food…”

Amen.

1. Matthew 25:31-46, NRSV [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Names in this story were changed to protect anonymity. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Volume VIII. P. 455 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Volume VIII. P. 456 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Food insecurity is measured by the U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module, which has been in widespread use for nearly 20 years. It asks questions about respondents’ reports of uncertain, insufficient, or inadequate food access, availability, and use because of limited financial resources, and about the compromised eating patterns and consumption that might result. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses the responses to classify households into four categories: high food security, marginal food security, low food security, and very low food security. Households with high or marginal food security are called *food secure*, and households with low or very low food security are called *food insecure*.

    To define hunger for this report, we chose a precise and readily available measure called *very low food security*, which occurs when eating patterns are disrupted or food intake is reduced for at least one household member because the household lacked money and other resources for food…

    Thus, when we use the word ‘hunger’ we mean households experiencing *very low food*

    *security*.” [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. ? [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. ? [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. NCH 14 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. NHC report pg. 15 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. NCH 16 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Erin Nolen

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