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JEREMY BIXLER: Hello. We're here on Youth Ministry Academy Radio today with Jon Middendorf and Jamie Gates and we're talking about social justice which is our topic this month at the Academy. And so as we start off the interview, Jon what is your position in ministry?

JON MIDDENDORF: I get to pastor the church here in Oklahoma City, OKC First, and I've actually been at that church for about 20 years, but I've only been their senior pastor for the last two.

JB: How did you become passionate then about social justice? What got you connected with this topic?

JM: Well, I think it happened because of a combination of things. It was a product of some of my study there at Southern Nazarene but also was one of the main themes of our pastor's message. The pastor that preceded me was a man by the name of Dr. Steve Green. And through his preaching and teaching he was able to open my eyes to the situations and scenarios around me, not just all over the world, as important as all that is, but right there around me where there were injustices in places where we could as a church and as believers make a kingdom impact. And so, I think it's been a growing, dawning awareness for me, especially over the last 15 years or so, the last decade.

JB: And Jamie, introduce us to you. What's your position?

JAMIE GATES: Since 2001 I've been teaching at Point Loma Nazarene University. I teach in the department of sociology and social work. I'm their resident cultural anthropologist. And I've also founded and direct the Center for Justice and Reconciliation here.

JB: Now, the Center for Justice and Reconciliation, give us an overview of the work of that.

JG: Yeah, I was brought here to help the university stay true to its commitment to, you know, sort of our heritage and particularly Wesley's concern for the poor, or shall we go back to Jesus' deep concern for the poor and before that the prophets. And so we created a university center that its mission is to study poverty and oppression and to teach Christian means of social engagement or as I like to say it, "to nurture the prophetic imagination."

JB: Now how did you get into social justice in your past?

JG: Actually, when I was young there weren't a lot of justice questions I was asking. It took me going to college at Eastern Nazarene College, some great professors, and getting involved in student ministries at college, to start asking some real deep questions about, "Wow. I wonder why the church hasn't been wrestling with issues of justice as much as I see issues of justice in the world?"

JB: What were some of the occupations you had then before you came to Point Loma?

JG: Well, most of my life before Point Loma was in school, in graduate school and so on. Although, all the way through I had been working on the side. So, in Kansas City I worked in a number of different non-profits. I worked as a job trainer for Job Corps. I worked in an intermediate housing program for homeless families called LINC – Living in New Community. My wife and I lived down on 41<sup>st</sup> and Troost in the heart of the city and were resident mentors there for some time. Then I helped grow the Blue Hills Church

of the Nazarene Community Center and ran summer camps for kids from the community. I had one year called “Out of Africa,” where we took kids from inner city in Kansas City out to a farm and made life happen for them out there. So those are kinds of things I’ve done along the way.

JB: Jon, I’ve got a question for you. When looking at social justice, what is the Biblical apology for the practice of caring for injustices in the world?

JM: Well, you know, to be honest with you, I think it is a theme that runs throughout the entire narratives. So there are some passages of scripture that I think maybe provide us with some very clear windows as to what we mean and what we’re about when we talk about social justice. My favorite comes out of Luke chapter 4 when Jesus describes himself as the realization of an ancient dream about the day of the Lord or about jubilee. And even then He is quoting from older passages. There’s one in Isaiah 58, another one in Isaiah 61. But when Jesus says all that he does about being the embodiment of this dream whereby prisoners are set free and hope is brought to people, and hope and good news is preached to the poor, and there’s recovery of sight to the blind, to me that is the single best passage of scripture that gives us a window into this amazing category that we’ve now understood as social justice.

JB: Jamie, anything to add to that?

JG: Yeah, I think, you know, if we start with Jesus and absolutely I’d start probably the same place that Jon started in Luke 4. I know as evangelicals we often run to Matthew 28 as our text for evangelizing the world and yet, you know, we’re called in Matthew 28 to become disciples and so the question should be right off the bat, well disciples of whom? Disciples of Jesus, of course, and this is the Jesus that has come to bring good news to the

poor, good sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, release to the captive, and to declare the year of the Lord's favor. So I also go back to, you know, what do we mean by the year of the Lord's favor? Where are these texts coming from? I look at the prophets and, you know, you start in Leviticus 25, you learn about the jubilee and the redistribution of resources that God called on the people of Israel to do in Leviticus 25. You see it repeated again in Deuteronomy 15 and it becomes a little more nuanced. Or you read in the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, the deep concern for the widow and the orphan and the stranger, and that constantly God's coming back to judging the people of Israel or their way of acting as a people. And if the widow and the orphan and the stranger are not taken care of, something is amiss and the will of God is not being pursued.

JB: Looking at the tradition of the church throughout the 2000 years of the institution, give us, Jamie we'll start with you, give us a history of justice as acted out by the church.

JG: You know, it's interesting because I was thinking about this with Jesus' own witness. When we think of justice it can mean a lot of different things. And, of course Israel was expecting justice when the Messiah came. And the notion of justice would be, you know, a Messiah who came rather than riding in on a donkey who came riding in on a white steed is willing to mete out justice and overthrow maybe Rome at the time and begin to set up a new kingdom that meant literally setting up a kingdom a lot like Rome except maybe more for the Jews and more just, a more loving government, maybe. And yet, Jesus comes riding in on a donkey. He establishes a people who are a people of the cross. The kind of justice that finds, I guess, itself mostly in Mark, for example, as a suffering servant. So a donkey, not a white steed. Jesus washes the disciples' feet. The early church

then acts this out, you know, literally. In Acts of the Apostles 2 and 4 we read how justice is meted out early on in the church, that when people come together to gather, you know, the disciples are encouraged to share their goods, to begin to gather in such a way that the least of these are taking first position and first place in the kingdom of God. And so, you know, from the early church, Acts 2 and 4, and then in the early catacombs where Christians are fleeing from persecution, you know, there's a lot of ways in which justice plays itself out, not as macro systemic change, but as creating a new community. And so, I'd begin there, I think, Jeremy.

JB: Jon, I wanted to ask about your specific faith community at Oklahoma City. What is social justice? How is that being done in Oklahoma City?

JM: Well, there is in Oklahoma City, let's start there. There is a larger and larger appetite to see some of our own cities ills at least discussed, if not cured. Oklahoma City has a pretty spread out sort of situation. We are one of the top two or three largest cities if you're just talking about the number of square miles. But we don't have any kind of significant mass transportation sort of system. And so, it's, we're now to the point where people now understand that in a spread out city like ours with the lack of a mass transportation system, if you don't have access to a car, then you are many, many more times likely to be living beneath the poverty line, you and all the people in your household. So the city has started to gather up opinions and the church has actually been at the forefront here in trying to put together a coalition of churches and synagogues and other faith communities who are now willing to get together and say with one voice to the city, "It's time that we addressed this on behalf of the poor and the needy." Like Jamie said so well earlier that the widow and the orphan in Oklahoma City. And so we're finally starting to see some

things shake loose and change. There's been some money finally allocated for at least an improved mass transit system. And really what we've been able to do is take that conversation and really parlay it into several other conversations where we can say, "Ok. We also have some other concerns about education. We have some other concerns about housing in our city. We've got some concerns about how the correctional system works." And so now this gathered body of churches and faith communities now has a voice to speak to issues of social justice. So if you bring that to OKC First right there on our street, what we're doing is we're playing our role. We are one of those people who's, we are one of those congregations that's reaching out to other congregations trying to build this group that can speak with a unified voice. But at the same time we're also working locally for our neighborhood. We are now offering three different literacy classes for our neighborhood. We are in an increasingly depressed area and education is spotty in our neck of the woods. And so we're trying to help out as best we can with the literacy campaign. And we're seeing some pretty good results, at least in terms of some of the test scores. We're also in the neighborhood that, strangely enough, with all of the commerce that happens around us we are still in a neighborhood that's got some low income housing and some people that actually are hungry, and so we have partnered with a Catholic church in town to try to take more responsibility for all of the households in our Parrish. And so we are gathering food and then dispensing it on a regular basis. At the same time we just are going over to a section 8, would be government assistance, assisted, housing or apartment complex where there is a crime problem, also a poverty problem, and also a hunger problem. And we're a presence over there almost all afternoon on a Sunday. And we're watching as the simple gesture of a meal cooked for a

bunch of people there is allowing other doors to be opened and now we're into some parent training and some other job skill related sorts of training endeavors with that bunch over there. So social justice for us has an embodied sort of component to it – always will have an embodied component to it. One of the things that we like to say is that the Gospel is about whole bodies and not just souls. And so we understand it to be our business, anything that can help improve the quality of life for the people both inside the church and around the church and outside of our church. So, that's what we're up to.

JB: And Jamie, at Point Loma and in San Diego, where is justice being served?

JG: Yeah, I love that we switched to this language of justice. We'll talk sometime maybe about social justice being a bit of a problematic phrase, but, you know, San Diego's a unique city. We are, it's actually, I'd like to talk about San Diego Tijuana because we are sitting on this metropolis that is a global city where globalization comes to us. And of course issues of, you know, having a national border cut through the middle of your city, raises all kinds of international issues of justice. I mean, I'd like to, I guess, affirm what's happening through Jon's church, I think, I think justice always has to be embodied. And here in San Diego it's embodied, you know, in some ways the lack of justice is embodied in the lives of families who are split apart by a border. Or it's embodied by families who just can't make it, make ends meet here, one of the most expensive cities in the country that has this radical gap between those who have and those who don't have. I work with a group called the Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice which is a group of mostly pastors and some rabbis and a few imams who look at the lowest wage workers in town and really try and pay careful care and attention to what's happening to them, and when civic policies come up or when different companies move into the area, you know, we

ask questions about what they're doing and how the janitor's doing; how are the security guards doing in all of this? And are they paid enough to live in such an expensive city? Is there a living wage here? We deal with those kind of questions. It's interesting how it draws together people of very diverse backgrounds. You start asking a very simple question like, "Are the people around us being paid enough to be able to secure a good life for their families?" And so there's work here on immigration, trying to work with families who themselves are spread across this border and documentation and undocumented folks at the same time, people working in our strawberry fields here who can't make ends meet and they may or may not be documented and how do we pose as a church really complex kind of questions. And yet if we're talking about the stranger, welcoming the stranger, the alien in our midst, for us it takes on a very practical character in the life of those who are undocumented. Those are two examples – working with low wage workers and working with those who are migrants in this area. In addition to some of the things that Jon was mentioning about – working with the homeless, working with people who, boy you should see the lines growing in San Diego around a diminishing sort of supply of food in this area. Even those giving to the larger food banks has gone down and yet the numbers of people have gone up. And of course we want to ask, you know, how should the church be involved here because we think they desperately should be.

JB: Let's talk about that term: social justice. I heard you say that it's problematic. Unpack that for us a little bit.

JG: Well, I tend to use the language of the kingdom and the language in our scriptures as my starting point. And that phrase "social justice" has such a generic quality and character to it. In its best light it comes out as social catholic, Catholic social teaching, which is a

good light, but it's also been co-opted by so many different angles. It has no particular direction to or context to it. So our language, I use justice and reconciliation out here to tie those terms together because they come directly out of the scripture. And so I don't want to get too bent out of shape by it because I think there's a sense in which we can talk with those who think more in general categories about social justice. But what we're really talking about, we're using it as code language for something else – maybe the kingdom of God, the reign of God, God's justice in the world – and social justice kind of leaves God out just a phrase in and of itself. That's part of my problem with it.

JB: At NYC the two of you did a track on social justice. So Jon, I want to start there. We talked about at NYC works of mercy. Could you tell what those are first of all and how they came about in the church?

JM: Well, Jamie's going to do a better job with this question than I will and so I may defer to him. I would say this that works of mercy start when a church starts to take seriously this very challenging label that Paul gives us: the body of Christ. When the church starts to recognize that it has an obligation to pay attention to what ails a neighborhood or a community or a city then the natural result from that kind of understanding of our own moniker, our own labels "body of Christ," a natural understanding that we are, in fact, empowered because of all the things that we talk about, all the things that we sing about, all the things we believe about the assistance of the Spirit. I think that what happens is a natural result of all of that is that the church starts to posture itself to be an agency of relief and help and release. And that's where some of these works of mercy would come about. And, Jamie, I'm going to hand it back over to you because I think you'll do a better job answering that question than I will.

JG: Yeah. It's interesting because if we draw on Christian tradition, you know, all the way, you know, Christian and Jewish tradition, you know, starting I guess focused in Luke 4, Isaiah 61, the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and beyond, and in Matthew 25, the works of mercy that have come to the surface in the church has a series of six or seven practices of the church are as old as scripture itself. Of course, Catholic tradition picks up on this and kind of summarizes them for folks throughout church history by the middle ages and divides the works of mercy into spiritual works of mercy and corporal works of mercy. Wesley always talked about the works of piety and the works of mercy in tandem. The works of piety being scripture reading and prayer and attendance to the sacraments. The works of mercy being things like feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned. And he lived this out, you know, Wesley's work in the early 1700's and by 1738 they had their ministry was in a foundry, was in a factory essentially, a space that could hold 1500 people, an old munitions factory where they ran a school for children, they ran a loan fund for the poor so they wouldn't continue to be bilked out of excessive interest by the rich. They started prison ministries out of the foundry. And the works of mercy alongside the works of piety have been part of our heritage. And I was thinking about Wesley's letter to William Wilberforce that stood against an entire system, sort of taking the works of mercy very specific acts and saying if we are a people of mercy then something like slavery just shouldn't exist. And Christians and all those under the ear of Wesley's preaching were to become convinced and he would hope they would become convinced that slavery as a system was something that Christians should resist and find creative

alternatives to. So the works of mercy, they're kind of a summary of the goods works that Christians should do as they reveal this nature, this nature of God as a God of justice.

JB: I'd like for us to start going specifically through these works of mercy and talk about what is going on with this in the world and in local contexts. So, starting with feeding the hungry, Jamie, I'll start with you on this. What is the current state of hunger first of all in the world?

JG: Well, that's a really big question. Maybe too big for me to answer for sure. But when you have a world where 2 billion people, that's one, you know, essentially third of the world live in the world on less than \$2.00 a day, the equivalent of \$2.00 a day. You know that a third of people in the world are going without basic access to food. Or they're deeply dependent on emergency aid and so on. Is that the kind of world that Christ is calling us to live in and be in the world? It just doesn't seem to make sense given the banquet table as it's described in Revelation that we're all called to someday sit down at it. And so, you know, statistics vary pretty significantly, but 2 billion people, and that's \$2.00 a day, let alone the folks that are, you know, living in more complex, more wealthy societies like ours. I'll give you just some real quick examples. So at the Church of the Nazarene in mid-city here in San Diego, they've had a food program just giving out food Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, three times a week. And what started off with about 80 people coming about 4 or 5 years ago now has 400-500 people per day coming by for food. And people are trying to supplement their income, they're trying to give, you know, to get a bit of extra in the midst of really hard economic times. So while I want to talk about the 2 billion people around the world, I do also want to talk about the people in our cities that lack access to basic necessities like food.

JB: What is the church doing about that?

JG: That's a big question as well. So, you know, it depends on where we're talking about. You know, through Nazarene Compassionate Ministries there's a tremendous amount of food aid and we're partnering with different organizations through Nazarene Disaster Relief Response. You know, for example in the Philippines right now and in Samoa right now the church is reaching out pretty strong, right? But locally, I love some of the things that Jon was talking about – different churches getting together to pool their resources to be able to feed those who are hungry. It's interesting how, you know, I would hope that churches spend a whole lot more time actually feeding people, inviting people into their homes and into their churches and having meals with folks with people who are hungry. It's awfully easy to give a bunch of money to the local Second Harvest or local food bank, but the church's real call is not just to give food to the hungry, but to feed the hungry – to sup with, to eat with those who are hungry – so that the hungry are not them out there; the hungry, they are us.

JB: And Jon, going back to then what you were saying about the churches in Oklahoma City partnering together to feed the hungry. I'd like to know what are some of the actual transformative things that you've seen when people's basic needs such as hunger are met?

JM: Well, it's, it ends up being a dignity issue, I think, just as much as it is a physical hunger pang issue, and I don't mean to at all minimize the reality that in Jamie's city and then our city and in cities around the world. There is a serious hunger problem that results in men, women, and children feeling those hunger pangs. But when you are feeling that hunger pang, if the other costs of that is this sense that a human being matters. And some

of what we see when we're able to help a person not just to eat, but to help lift their quality of life such that they aren't struggling with the same issues. We're watching a direct correlation between that relief of this hunger issue and their sense of self-worth and dignity. And, you know, if you just add to someone's self-worth and dignity a little bit, you're going to be amazed at the transformation that will take place in front of your very eyes. We have seen, we have a young lady in our church now who is happily married and has a couple of kids but at one time was one of these people that we were offering all kinds of assistance to. But like Jamie said, it wasn't until people were more intimately involved in her life that they were able to befriend her, consider her humanity and her dignity and do more than just hand her something there. It was to help her so that she got an education and she got some marketable skills. And I tell you what, she's one of the best moms that we have in our congregation now. And I happen to believe that that's because she realizes what's at stake in the day to day lives out there. And it all started with people. It all started with people making themselves available and making resources available to feed this young lady. That the result is not just a changed life, it's a changed household. And so those are the kinds of things that we're able to see. Not often enough, to be honest with you; we'd love to tell those stories more often. But when we see them we sort of seize on them and it gives us hope for the next week, month, year.

JB: Moving on then to the next work of mercy, I want to concentrate on give drink to the thirsty.

And Jamie, can you summarize that work of mercy?

JG: Well, quoting Jesus, you know, "to give a cup of cold water," right? Or not necessarily quoting Jesus, but to think of the image of giving a cup of cold water in Jesus' name.

Except think literally "water." You know, think about those that thirst. And of course in

scripture it's used again as Jon is saying in both the literal and the metaphorical sense in that as the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman at the well, learns about thirst, that thirst goes much deeper than just the physical thirst for water. And yet, there is the very basic way in which, you know, as you look at the reality of the billions of people around the world that go without clean drinking water, there's been a lot made about this and at NYC we did a session on just the sheer number of communities around the world that don't have access to clean drinking water or they have to pay tremendous amount to have it flown in, trucked in, bottled, and into their communities, and, you know, the difference between a community that has such easy access to water like San Diego and Tijuana, the city right next door that has significantly less infrastructure, is a justice question. If you ask what resources go into one part of the world where we have such easy access to water infrastructure versus what go in, and versus what goes into part of the world where people pay three and four and five hundred times the amount for their water because they lack the infrastructure. That's a justice question. I think God cares about those questions and so it means thinking about water not just as a person what I do as with my own habits, like maybe I give up drinking bottled water because it's so damaging to the environment, but it also means thinking about people who live in parts of the world – what can I do? Maybe I can be creative like play pumps. I don't know if you've ever heard of them, but play pumps who go around the world and put merry-go-rounds in very rural communities who don't have access to water infrastructure, but those play pumps double as water pumps. I know that our church has been involved in planting water pumps around the world in different places as well. So, I think, you know, give drink to the thirsty has that very practical outlet to it as well.

JM: I think it's exactly what Jamie said and I think because you are talking to people who, and see my situation's not even like Jamie's. We're right in the middle of the country, and so we, I think we probably take for granted the availability of clean water. But as we are involved in certain areas we recognize how much good you can do. And again, it's not just, it seems like, and Jamie, you correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like water is one of those issues that if you can get it handled and surrounded, you actually are going to help the community or a city or even a nation handle other things. Like there are disease issues and also vegetation issues that if we could handle this water situation then you could make a profound difference in the quality of life of an entire community if you can handle this water issue. So it's bigger than just the being thirsty and the getting a drink. It's bigger.

JG: Some are arguing that sort of the political wrangling over water in the next decade or so is going to get more intense than the wrangling over oil as a resource. It seems to me that's a, that's a difficult question for the church to begin to think about where it stands in all of that.

JB: I'm really intrigued, Jamie, about the play pumps that you talked about. Can you give us a little more information on that?

JG: Well, I think, I think the point is to get it, to put our most creative, you know, minds and hearts to work at creating, it's called, the organization I was talking about is called Play Pumps International, and people can find out about that particular organization at [playpumps.org](http://playpumps.org). But it's, I don't believe it's particularly a Christian organization. My concern is more even if we thought about our sister churches, the very, the Nazarene churches that are around the world that lack access to clean drinking water, you know,

there's great, there's very interesting new technologies for developing pumps that are locally sustainable and that have, you know, and interestingly enough, placing a pump by a church, which is typically for the public good, keeps it away from being a private resource that somebody just exploits and makes too expensive. There's just a host of new technologies and there are churches getting concerned about their own sister churches and helping them to develop, you know, access to water without... You know, the one thing about water is it's also, it's also a justice system at the level of gender, right? So who carries, in the most rural of places or even in cities, in big slums in cities like Kibera outside of Nairobi, who carries the water every day? It's typically young people, typically kids and it's typically young girls in particular who's, who a quarter to half of their day is taken up in transporting water just from a central tap or from a central water source even when they live near a city. And being able to free up the time of those young girls to be in school rather than carting water is a justice question.

JB: Moving on then to our next work of mercy then – shelter the homeless – and we again, Jamie, could you just give us an overview of the current issues with this.

JG: Well, harbor, it's shelter the homeless although I think it's maybe better "harbor the harborless" is an interesting way of saying that. So far most people begin to think that, actually let me say it differently. In the kingdom of God, should anyone be homeless? As God's reign has come to earth, on earth as it is in heaven, is there going to be people that live without shelter? No, right? So, what is the church doing about that? What is the church doing to witness to a God that brings everyone under God's wing? So, at one level you can talk about homeless, but I'd also like to say that this stretches a bit beyond that, right? So, I was thinking with our, with our deep challenge with people who are

documented or undocumented here. Sometimes harboring the harborless means you have to think very strongly and carefully about what it means to be a church who cares for people whether they have documentation/citizenship in your particular country or not. This is super-controversial. But there, you know, since in the church has always provided sanctuary for people who have been fleeing persecution; they have provided sanctuary for those without homes in their midst. So caring for the stranger is also a part of this shelter for the homeless or harboring the harborless.

JM: Yeah. We are in a city that has a certain number of people who are suffering what I would call abject homelessness. They just don't have a roof of any kind over their heads. But there is also another much larger population of people that we are considered to be next level homeless or under-housed. And these are people who, perhaps, are forced to go from couch to couch to couch, borrowing space here and there. These people and the homeless people, perhaps, are suffering some of the same ills. I think most of your listeners will be aware of a crisis, an economic crisis, and a lot of times it's called a housing crisis. Well, a lot of those problems have come home to roost. And many of their victims are the people who can least afford it. And so some of what we have tried to do is organize such that we can have at least a voice when the practice of bad mortgage lending is where that's concerned. We've got some victims even in our own congregation. People who have been victimized by shady mortgage lenders and this, that, and the other. And we are working toward a place where we can at least speak into our city and our state's understanding of what is legal and what isn't and what should be legal and what shouldn't be legal. That's one way that we are working on the harboring the harborless issue, but we, too, have an undocumented citizen conversation that's going on. In fact,

there was a pretty ugly piece of legislation that actually passed after it had been rewritten and softened a little bit, but house bill H04 would have made it illegal for a church to offer aid, transport, or comfort to someone found to be an undocumented citizen. Well, as you would expect, the churches in the area, not just churches but synagogues and other faith communities understood that to be contrary to our calling as believers. And so right after this legislation was announced, there was a giant petition that circulated and many, many pastors and rabbis and priests and all kinds of people signed this petition, hundreds of signatures, and so when it finally got back to the legislators that this was going to be a problem and a public relations nightmare if a church offers to help somebody or helps harm's way or children, harm's way only to be arrested and hauled off to jail because they were found to be undocumented citizens. Seems like our legislators became aware pretty quickly that that was not going to be good for business. And so they were able to soften that language a bit. And again, I think it's another point at which the church with its gathered voice was able to speak into the process for the better of the entire process.

JG: I just, that's beautiful Jon. We've had a lot of that work going on here in San Diego as well.

And I think sort of sheltering the homeless or harboring the harborless has to start at home. I mean, it's the basics of Christian hospitality. It's literally opening our homes to those in need, or literally opening our homes to the strangers. You know, the Mennonites for years have been running Mennonite My Way where they essentially put their homes on a registry, an international registry. And any Mennonites that know about this and others that want to sign onto it can come into a city and if you're on that registry they can call you up and say, "Hey. Can I come and stay at your house?" I mean, we've been

talking about sort of big issues here, but at its base justice is served when you welcome those strangers into your home through something like Mennonite Your Way.

JB: We'll move on now to our, to the next work of mercy – clothe the naked – specifically talking about sweatshops and issues like that. Jamie, can you give us an overview of that?

JG: It's interesting. We did this exercise at Point Loma a couple years ago where students stood outside the cafeteria and they asked others if they wouldn't mind if they cut off the tag from their t-shirt. And we had this big map of the world that they started to pin all of these tags. And you noticed how, you noticed pretty quickly how the places where things were made were concentrated in places like Indonesia, and Thailand, and Central America, and the factories, the garment factories have a particular pattern to them. And garment, the people that make the initial versions of these before they piece them all together, the garment factories in the world are in places in the world where they have the cheapest labor, where environmental regulations are the most lax, and the companies that we're benefitting from are benefitting from the exploitation of workers in some cases, and more cases than we'd like to know. And so we talk about clothing the naked. And then you might want to go ask, "Well, how are we clothing each other?" You know, in what ways? And sweatshops, you know, are essentially a code word for factories with under aged and low-waged, extremely low-waged labor with very little protections, often with no labor protections whatsoever – no overtime, no sick days, no health care – simply very long, tremendously difficult hours. And it's for clothing, it's for, you know, Mardi Gras beads, it's for the kind of appliances you have in your kitchen. It brings up a lot of questions, even just beginning to think about clothing and what it takes to clothe those who don't have it.

JM: Yeah. Jamie's actually been very helpful to me where this particular subject is concerned. I will take a little different turn with it, not at all to differentiate, but just to add to what this might mean. We are taking this to mean, again I think we have, I think we have at times underestimated the plight of some of the people that are close to us, and so part of what we are doing is we are contracting with a couple different organizations that gather up clothing from manufacturers or clothing from stores that isn't going to be sold and if not picked up was just going to be either destroyed or turned into rags, and we have made it a point now and actually set up... a man in our church set up a small company to receive all of these goods and then turning them. We take them to different parts of the city where there are people who need coats or people who need shoes or something along those lines. I think, and I'd hate to be a guy who pounds just one drum, but we're trying to be people who recognize that the needs of the body, those are Christian situations that we aren't allowed to be people who are just concerned about someone's insides, as important as that is. We have to be people who are concerned about their needs and whether or not the children in Oklahoma City area have the coats available to them to survive what typically are pretty tough Oklahoma winters. And so, that's some of what we're doing. We're buying stuff that would otherwise be destroyed and we are giving it away and making it available to the people around us. And that's the way in which we are most actively involved in the clothing of the naked.

JB: The next work of mercy is, it's heal the sick. What's going on with disease control and prevention?

JM: Well, I can tell you this. We're having the folks who are supplying the flu shots come to our church. And we are making the flu shot available to our folks. And they don't have to pay

for it. It's the company that's bringing it to our church for free, but we're asking our folks who can to go ahead and make a donation and then we're going to buy several other different shots or more of this vaccine and we're going to take it to different points in the city where flu and other diseases of that ilk are a great danger to the elderly or to children, really to anybody. So we are gathering up money to take it down in our city. We're taking it down to 10<sup>th</sup> and Penn, 10<sup>th</sup> and Pennsylvania. In addition, just to speak then to our larger city, we are seeing an explosion of clinics around because it seems to be that our city's aware finally that this is a quality of life issue and if we can offer basic healthcare sorts of needs to people, regardless of whether or not they can afford it, if we can offer some care to these folks then it actually is going to improve the overall quality of life of everyone in our city.

JG: I would just add to that in that, you know, there's a healing the sick becomes a justice issue when some can get care when they're sick because they have the means to get care and others can't get care because they don't have the means to get care. And it seems to me that there are, you know, radical disparities in access to the kind of health care or the kind of healing that's available. You know, AIDS for example, is centered in, on the continent of Africa in terms of its incidents. And only now in the last year are drug companies starting to allow generic versions of their drugs to be distributed to help combat the radical spread of HIV AIDS. And that seems to be a justice issue, sort of how people get access to health care and who gets access. And the church, I would argue, has consistently throughout history been on the side and not always in its dominant form but has been on the side of those who are on the margins. In this case, you know, we have to start to ask, "Well, who doesn't have access to health care? Who doesn't have access to

the healing medicines and technologies that many of us have access to?” and then find ways to get it there. If it’s through our hospitals, like in Swaziland, I know that there’s a lot of work being done in the church in the Swaziland hospital, a lot of work being poured through the Church of the Nazarene into AIDS care in South Africa. It seems to me that’s a really strong move in the right direction.

JB: Right now in our country, in the United States that is, there’s a big debate over health care and I would just like to hear a Christian justice perspective on that debate.

JM: Well, I think what Jamie said is spot on there. I think it’s right when he says it becomes a justice issue when the amount of money in someone’s account or pocket dictates the quality of their care. And I would add my voice to that. I would say that at the very least, I think human beings have, can have the expectation that they would have access to those medicines and those procedures that can at least address their medical needs. You know, it is ongoing. It’s a very hot debate like you’re saying, but I think, if you’re asking me what I believe a Christian response is, I think that Christian response at some level has to be this that everyone needs to have access to health care. One way or the other everyone needs to have access to health care. Jamie, what do you think?

JG: Well, health care is a very large percentage of people’s expenses in the United States if we’re talking about the debate currently. Part of the challenge of the church is the church tends to fall into the debates along red and blue lines rather than thinking along the lines of a sort of what would things look like in the kingdom of God? And I’d have to go with Jon here that, you know, as I’m thinking about the great banquet table, as I’m thinking about God’s heaven on earth, then no one is left out. No one is left out. No one is left to the side because they don’t have the right job or because they can’t afford things. Now when it

comes to advising, you know, big systems like the health care system in the United States or the government of the United States, again it's tricky because we are not first and foremost people of that system. And yet we engage it and we have to interact in it. And so I think as a church we have an opportunity to continue to push for and stand in as a voice for those who don't have access. Those who have access in the church, there are those in the church who have access and those in the church who don't have access. So we are standing with our brothers and sisters who don't have access and something's got to change.

JB: The final work of mercy we're going to talk about here is "release the captives." And Jamie, what are the current issues?

JG: Let me talk about that briefly in, at two levels. I'm part of a house meeting on Thursday nights called Esperanza down in Imperial Beach, right down near the border. And a friend of ours who we've been walking with for two years was in prison for a little while during our time together. And both he and his wife, and one of the, when his wife got out, we met, we went and met them, about 30 of us, young children to old about; it started out at nine o'clock at night and went to eleven o'clock at night until she was actually was released from the women's prison here in town – Los Colinas. And the only place we could find open was a Kentucky Fried Chicken. So we had a big picnic banquet at eleven o'clock at night with all these kids waiting for Angel to come out of prison. To me that's part of releasing the captives, being able to find freedom, to celebrate freedom when it happens. Another way was when her husband was in prison, he would call from a prison cell, use up some of his hours, call collect, and during Esperanza, during our Bible study, and we'd be singing his favorite choruses while he was on the phone for about five

minutes. A form of releasing the captives. But it raised for us all kinds of questions about well who's in prison, why are they in prison, why is there a disproportionate number of people who are black and Latino in the prison system? What is going on that makes us have to bonk our heads against the wall so often with our friends who are in prison for ticky-tack offenses when people are being bilked out of millions and those folks aren't in jail. Nonetheless, you know, so I think "release the captives" has this very personal kind of church; the church should be involved in caring for actual prisoners. But the church at another level should be asking big questions about the pattern of imprisoning, of the way in which we imprison people. And is it just, are there, are there, are there people being treated as persons or as animals? And being willing to shine the light on where injustices are happening in the prison system.

JM: Yeah, we've got a scenario in which a man in our church going through a particularly tough time was pulled over for drunk driving and was arrested, sent to prison, and what should have been something that he, not a minor offense in the least. I mean it's a very serious offense. But he should have been out of prison the next day. Well, he got caught up in the system and he was in jail much longer than he was supposed to have been there because of just the mechanics of the system. And while he was in prison was beaten so badly that we feared that he would lose his vision. It became sort of a rallying cry for our church to again, to have a voice where this discussion of whether or not prisoners are treated in a humane fashion. I mean, this one hits pretty close to home. I've got friends and family who have been subject to this system that I think is incredibly broken here in Oklahoma City in a place that has, I think it's the number two in the nation in terms of the number of churches per capita, and yet there seems to be, I think one of the things that justice

tries to do at every level is try, is tries to say to people there are no throw-away people. And sometimes prisoners are seen as those throw-away people. But you mentioned, Jeremy, too, a different kind of captivity and we're trying to be involved in other types of captivity or slavery. There is a prostitution problem in our city as well. And most of the time women are prostituting themselves out and it has something to do with drugs or a drug addiction. And so not too long ago one of these ladies just wandered into our church and sat down because she was tired. And our children's pastor actually is the one that walked up and began his conversation with her and come to find out this was a woman who was locked in a prostitution cycle and largely it's because she was on drugs, and also found out that she was far from home. That she lived in Arkansas and just believed that her parents would not welcome her back home. Well, our children's pastor just picked up the phone and called. Just called the family and said, "Do you know that your daughter's here in Oklahoma City and she would really like to come home?" And our church was able to purchase the means to get her home and we think we struck a blow for justice there. If for no other reason it was, it was one of the ways in which that release for the captives was preached and borne out in this message that was delivered by a children's pastor to a woman who was fresh off the street. So I think captivity happens in all kinds of places including prisons but certainly not limited to prisons.

JG: If I could just affirm that, you know, I just came back from a global forum on human trafficking held up here at a church in Escondido where we looked at the labor and the sex trafficking going on in the world. And it's sort of a, the church is sort of like this sleeping giant just becoming, just being awakened by the fact that we have a global slave system on the go where anywhere between conservative estimates are 12 million and up

more other estimates say 27 million people, mostly young girls, and the majority of them being young girls, but also men, enslaved or in some kind of debt slavery or peonage or some kind of sex trafficking ring. And there's a lot of Christians starting to get involved and starting to make other people aware that this is happening and saying, "Look, we're back in the late 1800's, late 1700's here again. What's going on?"

JB: What are some practical ways that individuals and churches and youth groups even can get involved with bringing justice?

JM: Well, here's one of the things that I think a youth group has to do, one of the things that a church has to do, and by the way I think sometimes the youth group will have to lead the way, I think the youth group is going to have to survey its neighborhood and see what it is that compromises quality of life in the neighborhood, and they need to have their eyes open and their ears open such that they can really take in what is going on so that they can actually see if there is an education battle going on, if there's a crime, if there's a poverty issue, if there's an illiteracy issue. I think first of all what has to happen is faith has to be articulated for that youth group and for that church in ways that actually sends people out of the building recognizing not just their opportunity but their responsibility to bring about the heaven on earth that Jamie was talking about earlier. The second thing I would say, and then Jamie I'll get out of the way 'cause I want to hear what you're going to say, too, the second thing I would say is once you figure out what it is that you want to work on, please don't feel like you have to reinvent the wheel or work in isolation. Probably if you find something that you're passionate about, or that your youth group or that your church is passionate about, in all likelihood there is already an organization that would welcome you and welcome your help or your youth group's help. So some of the

more powerful things we're able to do today, we actually did not originate, but we're actually partnering with different organizations. If someone is eaten up with this issue of captivity overseas, I really think a whole lot of this invisible children project and maybe someone in the youth group can figure out a way to secure some of these videos and watch some of these videos and then they will give you very specific ways to get involved. Ultimately, and I'm sure Jamie would say the same thing, we would like to see whole lives get involved and not just the sending of resources or the buying of bracelets, but we would like to see people take very personally these issues that are taking place around the world.

JG: Jeremy, I'm going to say we need to start with discipleship. I think we need to be spending more time reading the Bible economically and reading the economy biblically. But there is real depth of wisdom in our scriptures around being a kind of people, being a body, being economically in the world in such a way that number one creates more hopeful alternatives than the slave systems that we have in place and the debt systems that we have in place. But that number two makes us really uncomfortable when we find the injustices that exist in our world. So I'd say start with discipleship; start with, you know, reading, you know, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, which is a classic now, you know, and the church can begin to unpack, you know, go check out the, you know, Shane, go read Shane Clayborne's *Irresistible Revolution*, probably all the young people have read it. Have their parents read it. But it really does begin with discipleship with beginning to see that justice matters to the heart of God and that, and then to move on to seeing, you know, just where that's not happening. I'm with Jon; there's lots of ways to get engaged directly, right? So, you know, you were talking about, you know, human

trafficking. I would recommend International Justice Mission and the work that they're doing. You know, if you're talking about water issues, you know, the group I was talking about was Healing Waters. Check out Healing Waters, the purification systems and started by some Nazarene kids out of Point Loma. And I just, on Wednesday we have a chapel and some kids from the school here and from Southern Cal here started a bicycle business of all things in Zambia to help transport medical supplies and people getting back and forth to work on roads that are just collapsed. And they're making the bicycles out of bamboos. They call it Zambikes. Go check it out. Zambikes.com, I think it is. And, you know, partner that kind of work with the church that disciples deeply into the life of Christ and you've got very pragmatic step at a time engage, ways of engaging really great injustices, but really one step at a time, one organization at a time, one neighborhood at a time. And one other encouragement for any churches or youth groups that are getting involved is to start in your own neighborhood. Then think about other places. 'Cause the hardest place is actually to begin to make this change is in your own neighborhood.

JB: I would love to hear a response from each of you on what does a world, a kingdom look like specifically that has conquered injustice?

JM: Well, in this prayer that we have sort of touched on Jesus uses this very powerful phrase "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So I think the prayer assumes that there is in heaven a beauty to life, a health, a wholeness to life. Something that we aspire to, something that we have been singing about and dreaming about for decades. A world that is able to overcome injustice brings that heaven down to earth. And I think that is not only the possibility that we have when we use the term "Christianity," but I think it is one of the essential dreams of Christianity. It's what Christianity does. It's

what it's about. So what does the world look like when justice is overcome? Well it looks like God intended it to look like. It looks like heaven, and I think we have to be careful not to, not to somehow forget that heaven is not just some sort of far off place out there but what we have especially in the person of Christ, is that we have this amazing overlap between heaven and earth where God has access to earth and we have access to God. And we are supposed to by virtue and by means of that overlap and all the companionship that we get out of it we are supposed to be about the business of bringing that heaven to this earth. And so that's what it looks like.

JG: If we really believe that God was in Christ reconciling the world to God's self, healing all things, repairing the breach, then I think, you know, the kingdom of God is every space where the widow is begun to be taken care of and the orphan is taken in and the stranger is welcomed into your house. The kingdom begins to unfold. These signs of the kingdom are everywhere all around us. And, you know, we have the long term, you know, the eschatological vision, that fancy word that theologians give us, that has to do with where this is all headed and I want to always keep that in mind that, you know, the metaphors we have to work with are, you know, the metaphors of a great banquet table or a lion laying down with a lamb where the, you know, the swords are beaten into plowshares and these images of peacefulness, images of all peoples gathering around the throne of God. The peace that, like the language of social justiceness is that we will all be bowing in a great thanksgiving to God. That really the kingdom is about finally the worship of God in all its fullness and that the worship of God brings about this fullness. So in some ways you can't just kind of mechanistically create a more just world. A more just world comes about as we worship and follow the one that makes the just world possible.

JB: Well, thank you both for giving us your time today. And for those listening, make sure you are paying attention to the Youth Ministry Academy site all month long as we continue to talk about social justice. And finally, Jon and Jamie, thank you again so much for being with us today.

JM: You bet, buddy. Thank you.

JG: Thank you, Jeremy.