

Look around the table at this meeting. There's the aggressive natural leader always willing to say what needs to be said and sometimes what shouldn't be. There's the guy who used to have a temper, but with age and maturity will now stand up for what's right but do it with love. There's another strong willed and sharp leader who is really in control of this meeting. Another one sits there as a sort of right hand man known for encouragement, but who could certainly do what was necessary if called upon. And finally there's one with a history of being rough but with that gone now is loving and gentle yet firm and strong.

But who's at this meeting isn't as important as what's being discussed. They've come together to discuss the poor, sort of. This discussion is a meeting about what to teach the poor and what to share with the poor. It was a meeting to determine if they were all on the same page. But this wasn't a meeting of city leaders discussing the latest strategies to help the poor. This wasn't a meeting of non profits trying to determine where best they might invest their resources to help the poor. This was a meeting of church leaders in Jerusalem and the poor were both spiritually and financially poor.

A lot was accomplished at this meeting of great church leaders. We can learn what they determined about sharing with the poor from Paul's notes recorded in the second lesson. Most important is that for those spiritually and financially poor we want to...

**Remember the poor**  
**Share your faith**  
**Share your resources**

Two of the attendees at this meeting were disciples of Jesus, Peter and John. The other was a half brother of Jesus, James. They were major players in Jerusalem. It was ministry they were involved in, mainly ministry to Jews. From the mission field came Paul and Barnabas. They had been working among Gentiles. The question, were they on the same team working for the same goals? The meeting solved that question; they were on the same team. They were both preaching Jesus and the gospel message. It was through Jesus alone that people were saved from their sins, and both sides had this message.

Paul hadn't needed their validation. **"Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem...I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles."** He had already been working, preaching, and converting people with the gospel of Christ Jesus for fourteen years. God had given him the gospel personally. But he went because if those working in Jerusalem weren't onboard with him his work could've been impaired. False teachers would try and claim Gentiles had to become Jews needing to follow the laws of Moses if they wanted to be saved. That's Jesus plus good works. Paul wanted everyone to be clear; as he ministered among the Gentiles he never preached Jesus plus good works. Peter and the rest were preaching the same thing to the spiritually poor. It was Jesus alone to be saved.

I have a special heart for Gentiles, since I am one and so are you. In the centuries before Christ if you weren't a Jew you weren't part of God's family. Today our sins do that. Our sinful actions show that we're outside of God's family. Like the sinful action of not sharing. We don't naturally want to share anything. It doesn't take two little kids fighting over one toy to demonstrate that, we need only look at ourselves. Sharing our faith falls into that too. Our life might even give people the impression that to be saved its Jesus plus good works. Like good work could pay God back. That would lead others to wonder, which is it? Is believing in Christ enough or must we pay for it? If sharing our faith leaves this question then we're keeping the spiritually poor, poor. Our sinfulness and sinfulness in others demonstrates spiritual poverty. Naturally we don't have the faith to believe in Christ and be saved.

Jesus came for all people including Jews and Gentiles. Peter and Paul came to that understanding during the course of their meeting. **"They saw I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles."** The promise of God was a promise for all. That means you and me too. Jesus always meant for this message of the gospel to come down to all people. We're told by the Bible that the Old Testament laws can't save us at all. No law or good work can save us. Only the one who came to keep all the laws perfectly in our place can save us. Only the one who eliminated all law as a way to save can save.

Now it's time to share that. Remember the spiritually poor around us. They have no ability to pay God or do something that will save them. But we have a faith to share with them. Out of our wealth in Christ we share the wealth of Christ. The more we give the more we're given. Our faith grows as we share that faith with others. Your faith gets stronger the more you share it, speak it, and use it.

Sometimes unscheduled things happen at meetings you can't prepare for. Peter, Paul, and the rest at this meeting came to a realization they shared the same faith, the same gospel, the same Christ. **"James, Peter, and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me."** This, they realized, needed to be shared with the spiritually poor. That's when someone raised a great point that just needed a response. **"All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor."** They were looking for one way they could share their faith in Christ. To cement this new fellowship they would jointly help people not just spiritually but also financially with their resources.

To remember the poor we need to know the poor. Do we know the poor in our own community? Are we the poor when compared with millionaires and billionaires? Because we always want more money or resources maybe we convince ourselves we're the poor. We also work hard to insulate ourselves from seeing the poor in this country. If we don't see them we don't have to help them. Then we take the step of judging the poor as having not worked hard enough. We figure they don't deserve our help because they would just waste it anyway.

Remember the poor and share your financial resources with them not because of you but because of Christ. He became poor for us. The apostle Paul wrote, **"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."** Jesus became poor so we could become rich, spiritually rich with the blessings of forgiveness. He took the punishment for our sin of ignoring the needs of those who were poor in our families and among our neighbors. He suffered for all the times we didn't care to suffer. He died for us, for people dead in our sins.

After recognizing those in need don't assume you understand why they're struggling financially. Seek to listen and understand. Be willing to ask questions. Be willing to show compassion for a situation not like your own. Participate in food drives like the one we had here in November. Donate your time at the food bank on Saturdays. What lasts only a couple of hours can make you feel good that you've helped. Perhaps as a congregation we could sponsor a school in our area and help out with the backpacks for kids program or the coats for kids program. Some individuals could tutor or mentor at that school or other schools. You could become a big brother or big sister. You could donate time and money at a shelter. You look and you'll find ways.

Not one dollar donated or moment of time shared with helping the poor is going to bring them to Christ. People need to hear the message of the gospel. But sharing your financial resources might be the opening to sharing your faith and talking to someone about Jesus. That's sharing the gospel, that's sharing your faith. That's our ultimate goal as we remember the poor.