

Sunday, March 26, 2017
Did You Know?

The Poor

Almost every year when the men pack their tools and go to Mexico, I share with them this devotion from Deuteronomy 15 on the poor. As the people of God get ready to enter the Promised Land, they're told: "There need be no poor people among you" (v.4), because God himself will bless them. Then, just a few verses later God says, "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land." (v.11)

Now, consider these two statements side by side. Let's look at the second statement first. Why will there always be poor people? Here are a few reasons. The breadwinner can die unexpectedly. A person could be exploited by a deceitful person and lose their possessions. A person can make an unwise business decision. People can become victim to natural disasters like flood and famine. As a result of these circumstances, the poor will always be among us, even among God's people.

What about verse 4? "There need be no poor people among you." Another way this could be read is like this: "There should be no poor people among you." How so? Well, in the same chapter God tells them to be generous and open-handed, and not tight-fisted toward those in need, so when a person comes to a place of poverty, the community of believers must come to that person's aid and relieve their poverty.

When we trace the rest of the Old Testament, there are some records of God's people living this out. Boaz, the hero in Ruth's story is one such person. But, for the most part Israel failed to live this out. In fact, the two reasons for why Israel and Judah were judged and exiled were because they worshiped idols and they were unjust to their own people -- the rich were exploiting the poor. The great ideal proposed to the people before entering the Promised Land was never really lived out.

Yet, there is still hope. Fast forward to the beginnings of a similar community. They, too, were the people of God. After Jesus died, resurrected and ascended into heaven, He sent to his people the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit initiated and enabled and empowered this new community called "the church" and for the first time in the history of God's people it was written:

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ **that there were no needy persons among them.** For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

I've witnessed so many expressions of this kind of generosity in our church over the years. Let's be resolved to live this out, so that when our time is done, others might say, that because of God's powerful grace, "there were no needy persons among them." This is the Gospel come to life.

Pastor Peter