

When the Church is Great: Acts 4:32-37

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- [0 : 00] It's good to be together, church, amen. We begin our week worshiping our God. This morning we're going to continue our service by continuing our study in the book of Acts. We're going to finish up chapter 4 this morning. We're looking at Acts 4, 32 to 37. So join me in prayer, to prayer our hearts, to hear from the Lord.
- Let's pray. God, we come before you this morning, and we recognize that you alone are God.
- There is no other. There is none like you. And you have revealed yourself in the person of Jesus Christ. And so we worship you this morning.
- We ask that you would speak to us, that you would have our heart, that we would recognize that you are the potter, and that we would be malleable in your hands.
- [1 : 12] Spirit of God, give me unction and clarity, and use your words to change your people. It's in Jesus Christ, and all God's people prayed.
- Amen. Amen. We'll go ahead and turn open to Acts 4. If you're not there, 32 to the end of this chapter, and just to bring us up to speed.
- We've seen some mass conversions thus far in our story. In Acts 2, after Peter preaches his first sermon, says that there are 3,000 that respond and say, I want to follow Jesus with my life.
- Acts 4, in Peter's second sermon, it says in Acts 4, 4 that 5,000 men respond to the Gospel. And that number may not be the full number.
- It doesn't include women and children. And so perhaps at this point in time, the church could be anywhere upwards of 20,000 to 30,000 believers.
- [2 : 26] They're in Jerusalem in the days just following Christ's ascension. And so today, what we're given is a description of the Spirit that is present within this community.
- And it really is a parallel to the description that we've already received in Acts 2. Verses 42 to 47.
- And so let's read this together and hear what the word of the Lord has to say. Acts 4 beginning here in verse 32.
- Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul. And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.
- And with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.
- [3 : 29] There was not a needy person among them for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles feet.

And it was distributed to each as had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of the island of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet.

How many of you would love to be a part, be a part of a church that was described as so? This is a wonderful church. And this is a wonderful picture of God's people together right here at the beginning of the New Testament church.

I would want to be a part of it. And so would you. There is a kindness. There is a concern that is present in this community that is so obviously absent from the world in which we live.

We live in a world where people gather as mobs to loot stores. Could you imagine the evening news? You know, a bunch of Christians gathered.

[4 : 51] It was a mob and it was a mob blessing and they gathered to go and serve somewhere. They showed up with rakes and shovels and brooms and I mean, you don't read that.

You don't hear that in the news. And the first thing that I want us to recognize related to this description is that the early followers of Jesus, that their capacities have now increased and they have increased as a result of God's spirit that is now residing within God's people.

We've already seen that in the last couple of weeks as we have talked and observed God's people seeing an increase in courage, courage to identify with Christ and it's as a result of God's spirit now dwelling within them.

That is the power of Pentecost. We saw that religious and civil authorities demanding the apostles to stop talking about Jesus and how did they respond?

Peter and John are saying, hey, we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. This is a very big shift for Peter. Recall, it was just a few months prior where he is denying Christ to two separate servant girls.

[6 : 20] And here we have him saying, you know what? We have to speak of the gospel. And it's not just true of the apostles because you actually see an increase in courage for the entire congregation because it says in Acts 4:31 that the Holy Spirit continued to speak.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they continued to speak the word of God with boldness. So you see a change that has occurred in the lives of these people.

God's spirit resides within and their capacities have increased. They now walk not in fear, but they walk in courage. And in today's passage, what we see is it's not just courage, but now they have capacity to be an incredibly kind people.

Just consider the words that describe this church in Jerusalem. It says they were of one heart and soul.

So there is a unity. There is a mass of people and there is a unity in spirit. Another phrase that says no one said that any of the things that belong to him was his own.

[7 : 34] So there was an attitude that had shifted in these people. I'm not going to demand the things that I possess as being, I'm not going to hold onto these things tightly anymore.

It says they had everything in common. It says great grace was upon them all. There was a spirit of charity that was over this community and it was directed to one another.

And then I love this statement. It says there was not a needy person among them. Things had changed for these people.

And I would say that there is an overriding spirit of generosity that now marks their new life in Christ.

And so what I want to do this morning is before we consider some of the implications and then I want to give three specific facets of generosity from this passage. What I want to do first is be clear on what this passage is not teaching.

[8 : 39] So when you come to a section like this, there are some that might propose, aha, this is like Christian socialism that we're all supposed to begin to live this communal life.

This is not teaching that. Now for those that are, well what is socialism, Jay? I have a definition. I actually looked it up in Webster's and it's this. It's a system of society in which there is no private property.

There is a centralized agency that is both controlling and enforcing this shared ownership. And I want to remark on this because if you haven't been aware like socialism is very in fashion these days in this nation.

If you've never lived in a socialist country that is. And the word of God isn't promoting that. And what I want us to note in this section is that you know what?

People actually own their own property. And they weren't forced to sell these resources. They did this of their own initiative as they were moved by a need.

[9 : 54] You have this example of Barnabas and it's actually the first instance in Scripture where we meet Barnabas. But he sells some land voluntarily. He does this of his own initiative.

Next week we're going to look at Ananias and Sapphira. And I want us to note their sin had nothing to do with them owning their own property. In fact it says in Acts 4, 5, 4, while it remained unsold it did not remain your own.

After it was sold was it not at your disposal? So the resource whether it was land or money it was at your own disposal.

This is not a charter for us to all go monastic and move in together. And that's really good news for all of us.

I mean I don't, I don't, could you imagine Scott and myself living together? It would be awful. In fact I think you would have one less pastor that would be alive.

[11 : 01] Frankly, Melissa, I think she actually described us this week and she said, Jay, well she said, Scott you're practical Jay, you're whimsy. I'm like, yeah I'll take that.

And it's probably true. I came home this last week with a 17 foot Christmas tree and it was epic. Scott doesn't even put up a tree.

I don't know, is there a tree up in your house? Last night. Yeah, but Scott begrudgingly probably brought it up from the basement. Not happy about it. Like it's just a very, I mean Scott if you saw what I'd do to a tube of toothpaste you'd be like Jay that's a felony.

And this is our Christmas gift to one another that the Bible is not telling us we have to live together and I'm so very thankful. And so kidding aside like the essence here that we should see is that Scripture isn't calling us to the communal life but it is calling us to something.

It's calling us to a shared life. And really the essence of a shared life is that we would consider one another as family.

[12 : 12] That we would cherish the fact that we are actually able to gather, that we get to begin this week together. Because that's not true of every believer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said this in his work Life Together. He said it is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in the world.

Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the gospel in heathen lands stand alone.

So this is an evidence of God's grace to each of us. That we have a church body, that we have a church community, that we have a church family.

And I don't want the description of this early church to discourage us this morning as though we're going to focus on the gap that maybe exists in us as we look at them.

[13 : 17] The passage isn't meant to condemn. It's actually meant to encourage because there's a promise that is contained within this description of the early church and it's this.

It's something I already mentioned. It's that guess what? God's spirit changes people for real. And you possess God's spirit if you're in Christ.

Romans 8, 9 says clearly, if you don't have the Son of God, if you don't have the spirit of Christ, you're not part of Christ. Like if you're a believer, you have God's spirit.

There's not a two sort of package Christianity out there like some that get the spirit and others that get kind of part of the spirit. If you have God's spirit, you have God's spirit.

And it's what the Lord does when we confess Christ. We are baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit.

[14 : 17] There's a change. There's a change that occurs and we see it. I mean, think about how Luke described the apostles before this in Luke 9.

He says this in verse 46 says an argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. Is that a spirit of charity? Not at all.

Almost repeats himself in Luke 22 where he says, hey, a dispute arose among them as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

So are they thinking about the other? Not at all. And so the apostles just like us began life looking at their needs, their glory, but something has changed and if we're in Christ, it has changed for us as well.

We possess God's spirit and it gives us capacities we hadn't had before. And then we're actually given an example in this section of one of the members who really embodies this new caring spirit.

[15 : 27] Verse 36, it says this Joseph who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet.

That's an extraordinary thing. That is a generous thing to be moved by a need and to use resources to meet that need.

And I love that Barnabas is the first one mentioned because every time you read about this guy in Scripture, he is encouraging. He is giving his life away. In Acts 11, he's the one that brings money.

It's sent to the poor by his hand. You read later on that when Paul said, I'm done with John Mark Barnabas, no, I'm going to keep serving.

I'm going to keep ministering to him. I'm going to keep using him. There's ministry after failure. I'm going to be the guy that's going to pick him up and encourage him. It's just wonderful. Church, if we become, if we are, if we move this direction, being a church that is filled with these type of individuals, a church of Barnabas' who doesn't want to be a part of that?

[16 : 47] It's beautiful. And it's hugely attractive to the world. In fact, I would suggest that it is one of our leading apologetics because it says, in fact, Jesus says in John 13:35 by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

And I think what Jesus is doing there, He's not just giving the world permission to look at us. He's actually giving them a mandate. Look at my people. Look at my people. See the way that they behave towards one another and then decide is there something real going on there?

It's our apologetic, our love, our generosity within our community. It's the gospel scene to the unbelieving world.

And it's very attractive. And if you haven't noticed, kindness, generosity, it's just running very thin in our world. And I get that.

Some of you are like, well, Jay, man, I see there's this movement of philanthropy. And yeah, you can read Forbes and they have a top 50 list of what people make and then what they give away.

[18 : 01] It's all fueled by ego and shame is how much you make. You better be on that list.

But generosity and kindness on the whole, it's lacking. It's lacking. Greed. Is greed present in our world? Yeah.

It's actually how we began life. I had an occasion. It was Thursday and I'm driving in. And if you know where we live out on, like, Hazard Road and it is a major hazard, people don't drive there.

I mean, if you're on Hazard Road, you're coming to see me. But I was leaving for work and there was like a train of vehicles, cars and trucks and bigger trucks with trailers just like, I mean, just flying up the road and I almost got hit.

I was like, what in the world is going on? And I just I couldn't. And then I get towards the end and I see a sign that says estate sale and it had just opened and it was, I mean, I was like, I called home.

[19 : 11] I was like, guys, are you okay? Because there's you don't want to be on the road right now. And then as I get to the stop sign, sure enough, fire truck, ambulance sirens on, heading that direction.

It was it was just such a such an image of that rich fool, right? Got to get bigger bars. Got to get bigger bars. Now, I was thinking about going to the estate sale and I was like, not anymore.

I can't do that because I got to share with the church. So I don't know what I missed out on, but I probably didn't need it. I'm kind of just running thin, you know, and I think we can we can hear the news.

We can we can read about it. We know that hatred seems to be sort of this galvanizing spirit that yokes so many people together these days.

I don't even know what civil discourse is. It doesn't. I don't even know that it exists in our nation anymore. I think it's becoming normal to hear of these just awful stories of shootings, you know, the parade and walk ashore.

[20 : 17] It's just it's just heart wrenching and it's to the point almost where you can't even feel because it's just it's coming at you just so quickly.

spite vitriol is becoming the fabric fabric of our nation. And I would suggest we just simply live in a world of ungrace.

And so if we as a church forth can be and stay encouraged, I believe that we have great opportunity to demonstrate to represent a kind savior by the spirit of generosity that we have for for one another, but also yes for those without Christ.

And this passage, it's obviously describing a generosity of finances to meet needs within the body and trusting financial gifts to the leadership.

And that's what it means when it says this money was brought, the money was brought and laid at the apostles feet. We're going to trust the leadership and I want to tell you, you have a very trust.

[21 : 22] I don't even know if I can say that I'm part of the leadership. So what does that mean? Right? But I'm not assessing myself because I don't really have access to the money. It's a good thing I'd be buying 70 but Christmas trees for, you know, for the church everywhere.

But you have trustworthy people, you have trustworthy elders that manage the money incredibly well. Just this is a fiscally responsible church and you need to know that a lot of prayer, a lot of discussion goes into how the resources are used.

We want to use them for the gospel. I want to see God's news. Good news go forth. But this is what's taking place here.

It's a generosity of resources and I see that here at forth. Melissa was up here earlier. She mentioned you guys gave to the roundies. You guys gave like \$13,000.

They're going to make it over the Rockies is what I'm trying to say. And it's a blessing for you to have done that. They are overwhelmed.

[22 : 28] They're overwhelmed by your generosity. We have a missionary couple served the Lord on the field their entire lives and now we get to be a blessing to them to get them to their new home in Florida.

And if you relocated, you know \$13,000 doesn't go very far. But we get to be a part of that. So thank you. You know, we had a men's breakfast last month and just the change in the guy's pocket.

We collect like \$700 for one of our missionaries. So he could buy some resources before he heads back out. Like that's that's present in this church. There is a generosity of resource of treasures.

It's present and that would be easy to talk about. But you guys are doing a good job. So I'm not going to talk about that this morning. I'm going to give you three facets of generosity beyond the giving of our treasures. And I just want you to pick one.

Okay. If you're really brave, pick two. And I think for some of these, they may even be harder than giving of our treasures. And the first one is this. This facet of generosity is, it's the generosity of time.

[23 : 33] Well, Jay, now you're meddling like I was kind of getting a feeling of a warm hug from this sermon. And now you're meddling in my life.

And that's kind of what the gospel does. Right. Are we generous with our time? And it plays out in all sorts of different ways. You know, do we think about arriving early so that we can be generous with our time by being present to bless someone else?

I saw who arrived on time today. I took notes. I didn't.

Arrive early and serve in the ministry. Give them your time. It's our most precious resource, in fact, I believe. It's our time. It's our time. You know, let's be a church that never has to beg and recruit for folks to serve in ministries, especially children's ministries.

It seems like that often in the church is the one that many avoid.

[24 : 48] We had a situation come up actually on Thanksgiving. One of our pastors received a call from somebody in the area in crisis in our city.

And this person doesn't even attend fourth. And this pastor wasn't able. He was, I believe, out of town. But it's like, man, I can't get together with you. But you know, let me make a phone call, see if one of our, one of the persons in our church would be able to talk with you, you know, on the phone.

And so the pastor called one of our, one of your friends and said, hey, can you, can you give this guy a call? You don't have to. It's up to you. I get it. It's Thanksgiving.

They're like, no, I'd love to. So this person, this member of our church called this person up and then got together with them, grabbed coffee for two hours on Thanksgiving morning.

I love that we're a church like that. That's what that's generosity of time. That's an extravagant thing.

[25 : 51] And you see in this parallel passage back in acts to acts to 46 says, and day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes.

There is a giving of time. There's this intertwining of relationships that's happening. There's friendship that is actually occurring. I would suggest that we never use the term church friend.

Church friend can certainly be a positive thing, but oftentimes it can mean not a real friend. And I think we have to be honest with that. Oh, those are my church friends. Like what is a church friend?

Well, it's a person that can get this close, but they're not really officially in the club of my friends. Like we should be friends.

We should be friends. We'll try to have all you over for next Thanksgiving, but there's a limitation.

[26 : 49] We're already a very full house. Sometimes I don't get invited in. Okay. So I'm just saying generosity of time.

And I would say men, this starts with us in terms of how we interact with our families. Are we generous with our time towards them?

And I've wrestled with this because I have a lot of kids and there's things that we would do if we had less kids and, you know, and sometimes you feel like, well, I'm not spending enough time with this person or this or this and, and man, man, if I would suggest your hobbies, just do things that your kids enjoy.

Pick the hobbies that they like. And my heart, I like a lot of things because my kids like a lot of things, whatever their hobby is, it comes by. It's just a simple thing that's been very redemptive, you know, that I can do things with them.

I own a really nice camera. I hate taking pictures, but I have one. Because I have a kid that likes photography. I don't know. Maybe I'll sell on Craigslist. I don't know. Anyway, I digress.

[27 : 58] Second facet of generosity. Not only generous with our time, but are we generous with our words? Are we generous with our words?

There are words that we ought to give to others that often go unsaid. Words of encouragement.

Words of affirmation. Words of concern. I think I've shared the interaction I had with the young man I had taken to the hospital in my Uber a few weeks back.

And I shared with him, you know, that I believe God had his hand on his life and that the trial that he had been given with this condition that God was going to use that for good. And, and he thanked me.

It was a blessing to him. And I know it was a blessing because he gave me a nice tip. And it was like, I mean, I know it sounds kind of fleshly, but I mean, it's people aren't going to tip you if you said something unkind to them or they was like weirded them out.

[29 : 02] And I didn't have to say that. I didn't have, I could have not. And I think all of us have those moments where like, man, I should say it, but then I don't. And I'm just encouraged you do.

And as a spirit of God prompts you share those words because that could be life. That could be life to the individual that you are speaking to.

In fact, Proverbs says it this way in Proverbs 25 11, it says, a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

And that image is talking about like a sculpture or a carving, a piece of exquisite jewelry.

You know, this golden in silver and, and really the point of that proverb is that a word fitly spoken is beautiful.

[30 : 05] It's beautiful to the person that's on the receiving side of that. We had sort of a scare this last week. Some of our dear friends that live back on the West side, their son went missing for two days and they had search dogs and I mean, just, you know, your imagination kind of runs.

And then he was eventually found. And this was very unlike this kid. He's there was not he's never had been in any trouble. So just kind.

Just no issues, very quiet, but never any issues. And come to find out that he just left. He he was feeling some things inside and struggling with some things and and some of it was like, man, I'm like my parents, like, they don't know me and my dad, I'm struggling and I had a conversation with his father later this week.

And, and we kind of came to this conclusion that, you know, words were often not said to him because it didn't seem like he was ever in trouble or needed them.

And it was the other siblings that got a lot of the attention and a lot of a lot of the affirmation because it appeared that they needed it. And I would just suggest don't withhold words.

[31 : 26] If you think that person, man, they're great. You have no idea. If the spirit of God prompts you than act than act.

Generous with our words. Third area I would call us to do a little introspection on is our generosity and offering grace.

Offering forgiveness to others. Are we generous with our forgiveness? And I think that typified this community.

It said grace, great grace was upon them all. There was a spirit of charity that was just, it was present. People were quick to forgive. And I would say if you tend to veer towards the harsh side or, or being more of a critical spirit, then maybe this is the one that you need to consider.

Talk to the Lord about repent of. I've had to repent of, of a critical spirit on many a time. I lean more towards that direction. Some of that was because it was how I was trained.

[32 : 30] I worked with some critical people and it just, and it's like I've gone through years, it seems, of detox of having that. None of you want to be critics.

People forget critics. And there's no ministry in being a critic. Barnabas, we know. Why? Because he was a critic. Because he was an encourager. He was an encourager.

And so if you run around with a secret ledger on the sins that other folks have committed, that have maybe committed against you, like burn that.

I mean dumb stuff. Oh, I'm still angry about that person in line at Fred Meyer trying to get my prescriptions.

You know, it's like, there's always a line. This is going to be a line. God wants you to spend some time with him and pray. Maybe pray for those people.

[33 : 29] You know, it can go deeper than that. There may be seeds of bitterness that have crept into your marriage and it's destroying you. And you've got to repent of that.

You got to ask the Lord to give you the courage to forgive and to repent so that life can come back.

I've seen that too many times. And what happens is that kind of that seed that's been planted, that bitterness, it takes root and then it's five, ten years go by and then like there's not even like a closeness.

So repent, turn. And so you're maybe going great, Jay. Thanks for the encouragement. But how do I actually do that?

Is it just like, okay, ready, set, be generous? I mean, is that what, is this how this works? You know, saved by grace, but let's now get on with the Christian life through duty.

[34 : 31] Sounds very Galatian. How do we do this? How do we grow and how do we cultivate a growing spirit of generosity?

You want the secret? It's not really a secret, but here's your answer. It's the gospel. That's how it's the gospel that you have been loved and now you have capacity to love.

It's the daily reveling in the mercies of God that have been poured over your life. The grace that has been freely offered to you, to you, a person by the way, completely undeserving.

Every one of us, every one of us, grace is that rocket fuel to live a generous life.

And as Eric Lettison communion this morning, that was God reminding you that not just Paul, we read it together.

[35 : 56] We ought not look to another but recognize, perhaps I am the chief of sinners. When you partook of communion and as you're reminded of God's mercy and forgiveness and forgiveness and forgiveness, you can be far more charitable today in the way that you interact with your family and the people around you.

Because indeed, you are clean. You have been forgiven and you didn't deserve it. You didn't earn it.

And now you can freely give of yourself to others. I'll end with this image because I think this typifies the fact that we need the gospel and it's an event that took place in Luke, it's recorded in the other gospels and those maybe other occasions and we can talk about that at another time.

But in Luke, there's an event that took place in the home of a Pharisee by the name of Simon. It says there was a sinful woman that entered his home uninvited.

And a sinful woman would have been descriptive of a woman given to promiscuity, a prostitute. And this woman does for Jesus what Simon did not.

[37 : 32] She brought in with her this expensive bottle of perfume. A woman who did not belong.

And it says in Luke 7:38 and standing behind him, behind Jesus at his feet, this woman weeping. She began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

What in the world? What is going on?

And then Jesus turns to her, says, your sins are forgiven. Her act was extravagant. It's extravagant.

And I believe it grew out of a heart that dared to believe that she too could be forgiven.

[38 : 47] And he or she who has been forgiven of much loves much, loves generously.

You need the gospel for your salvation, but you actually need it for today in order to give your life away. You have been forgiven of much.

You're that sinful woman. And if you're going, no, I'm not. Great. You're worse. Because you're proud. And you're thinking, I didn't do that.

And who is it that's further from the cross? Is it the fleshly man or is it the proud man? So God has been extravagant with you.

And indeed, even if you are the one judging the woman, God is saying, if in Christ, you're clean. And when you know you're clean and you're forgiven, you want to be used of the Lord and the lives of the people around you.

[39 : 54] God would forgive me. Dare to believe it. Because I asked you a question about a month ago and I said, is it harder to believe God could forgive you or somebody else?

And I kid you not, aside from maybe one hand, everyone said, it's hard for me to believe God could forgive me. Yes. But why don't you like this woman dare to believe it? Because it'll change everything.

So we're going to end the service with a song, All I Have in Christ. And let's have that be our prayer, our declaration. Just dare to believe the words that we're going to sing to the Lord.

You bore the wrath reserved for me. Now all I know is grace. Oh, Father, use my ransom life.

Amen. That's the song, Josh.