

Unity in Adversity

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Ass Ass All right, if you've got your Bibles, go to Acts chapter 4.

Acts chapter 4 is where we're going to be this evening. We're continuing in a series we've been in now for several weeks, going verse by verse, chapter by chapter through the book of Acts.

And the beautiful thing about teaching through a book is you just kind of deal with whatever the next passage is. And the Lord always seems to have the message we need to hear, the perfect timing of what he would want his church to be thinking about and meditating on.

And so tonight we find our place in Acts chapter 4 and verse 32. And so if you have a Bible and you're ready to go, please stand if you're able, as we honor the reading of God's Word.

Acts chapter 4, Luke is writing here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And he says, Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul.

[1 : 39] 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.

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 that had need.

Thus Joseph, who was 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.

But a man named Ananias, whose wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.

But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?

[2 : 51] And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you've contrived this deed in your heart, and you have lied not to men but to God?

And when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

About an interval of three hours, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much. And she said, Yes, for so much.

But Peter said to her, How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.

Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And when the young men came and found her dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

[3 : 52] And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard these things. You think? So pray for me as I preach this passage.

Let's hope there's no specific application here, all right? So, Lord, here we are. We know these words were breathed out by your Spirit through Luke. And here we are on this Saturday evening ready to study them and learn from them.

And I do pray that you would open our hearts to receive what your Word is for every single one of us in this place. And so we're ready to listen. Come talk to us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You can be seated. The date was February the 14th, 1973. The location was Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines.

The occasion on that day was the long-awaited homecoming of 143 servicemen. Men who had just spent the last eight years of their life as prisoners of war in North Vietnam.

[5 : 06] Men who had endured enormous amounts of persecution. They had been physically beaten at the hands of the North Vietnamese. In fact, some of the men, when they were interviewed on television, would blink their eyes to, with Morris code, send a message of one word.

Torture. And as they stepped off the plane at Clark Air Force Base, the suffering they had been through was obvious.

Some of them were bent over. Others of them were crippled. They bore the marks of adversity on their body. The highest ranking officer of the group, a 48-year-old naval captain by the name of Jeremiah Denton, stepped to the microphone, his voice quivering.

As he said, we are honored to have served our country under difficult circumstances. We are profoundly grateful to our commander-in-chief and to our nation for this day.

And then he paused, only able to offer one more sentence, God bless America. And then he, along with the other officers, took one step forward and collapsed into the arms of their family.

[6 : 29] I want you to notice that image again that was just put up there. Put that up one more time. I want you to picture that. There's something moving about that. There's something that stirs our emotion about that moment, that picture of coming together, of being united in a time of adversity.

And, of course, we see that not just in examples like that. There are a lot of other examples in life where we see this. For instance, it might be a team that was facing adversity on the field, but rather than unraveling, they came together.

We've seen this, have we not, at times in our own country when we've been attacked or we are at war and our nation comes together in that moment of adversity.

Maybe it's happened in your own life. Like there was a time of loss or grief in your family. You lost a loved one and your family came together to support one another.

Most of us have experienced that situation. That is, your back was against the wall. You were facing adversity. But rather than falling apart, you were brought together.

[7 : 44] This is what many of us have learned in life. And it's this. Notice it on the screen. Sometimes from the ashes of adversity comes the beauty of unity.

Amen. Sometimes from the ashes of adversity comes the beauty of unity. And that is exactly what is happening in the early church here in Acts chapter 4.

Oh, in many ways here in Acts chapter 4, these are the best of times. Are you kidding me? Jesus has been resurrected from the dead. Jesus has appeared to over 500 people.

Jesus has ascended back. The Holy Spirit has come down in Acts chapter 2. The new covenant has been inaugurated. Jesus is being proclaimed.

The mission is advancing. Thousands of people are being saved and putting their faith in Christ and being baptized. It is, in a very real sense, revival.

[8 : 43] I mean, revival is taking place. God is doing a mighty work. This is the best of times. And in another sense, it's the worst of times.

These religious leaders want this movement stopped. The apostles are prisoners of war. They have been arrested. We saw that last week.

Threatened to shut up in Acts chapter 5. They will be beaten and tortured. They are facing adversity from every angle. The Jews don't like Christians because they're leaving Judaism.

The Romans don't like Christians because they don't worship Roman gods. In fact, they blame natural disasters on them. And yet, from all of this adversity comes unity.

The family of God in Acts 4 doesn't fall apart. They come together. Look at it in verse 32.

[9 : 45] 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 you see here the unity that the early church had. In fact, faith family, if the book of Acts teaches us anything, if church history teaches us anything, if we know anything about the last hundreds of years of the church, it's this.

Notice it on the screen. Adversity will not destroy the church. Adversity unites the church. That in all of this persecution and all the things that these Christians are going through, they're not falling apart.

They're not trying to hide. They're not reconsidering the mission. Instead, what are they? Verse 32. One heart and soul. And it's what, you know, certainly as a pastor for like 25 years, I read this.

And this is what I love about the book of Acts. It's so organic. Here's what you don't find in the trenches of what the early church is going through. Arguing about music styles.

[10 : 59] Nobody here is saying, well, I really like tradition. I think we should sing more contemporary. And it's too loud or it's not loud enough. Or you don't hear any of that. There's no fighting over the color of carpet. There's no complaining about the temperature of coffee.

There's not, can you believe how far I had to park from the building? Or how dare you take my seat at church? There's none of that nonsense that happens in so many churches.

Proves they're not Baptist. I can say that. I'm a recovering Baptist, all right? Because you know this in your own life. Adversity has a way of making you focus on what really matters.

These Christians don't have time to debate parking spots and comfortable seating because they're on mission in the face of adversity.

And that adversity has caused them to focus on what matters and that is their union together. Now, where did this unity in adversity come from?

[12 : 00] Look back at verse 32. It says, The full number of those who, say it, believed. Those who what? Believed were of one heart and soul.

So the people that were united here were the believers. Those that are following Christ. Those that have faith in Jesus. In other words, notice this on the screen.

Their unity was a product of their union with Christ. Their unity as a church was based upon their union with Christ.

And that superseded everything. They realized that God had brought them together by blood. Not their blood. You've heard me say this before.

But by the blood of the cross. That is our blood relation. The blood of Jesus. Amen? Listen, Christian unity is not something we create.

[12 : 58] Christian unity is something that God created for us when Christ purchased it on the cross. I preached a very message on that back in May.

I'm sure you remember it, right? In our Together series. Where we looked at this passage. Look at it, Ephesians 2.14. He himself is our peace.

Jesus is our peace. Who has made us both one. And has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in the ordinances.

That he might create in himself one new man in the place of two. So making peace. And might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross.

Therefore killing the hostility. Or as the Apostle John says in 1 John. If we walk in the light. As he is in the light. We have fellowship with one another.

[13 : 54] Our fellowship is not because of the light we create. It's the light we have in Christ. That is why this early church in the face of, oh my goodness, all kinds of opposition.

Torture and persecution. And losing jobs. And financial difficulty. They don't let that adversity pull them apart. Rather it unites them. Because they know Jesus has made them one.

So let me ask you, faith family and myself. Do you view church as a thing you attend? Or a people to whom you belong? What does one heart and soul mean for you?

And if Jesus died to create this unity. What are you and I willing to do to protect and maintain that? So we see clearly in the text the unity in adversity that the early church had.

Now how did they express this unity? I know they all voted Republican. That's a joke. They all liked country music.

[15 : 01] I mean that's a given because they're Christian. So I mean we don't even have to debate that one. They were all from the same hometown. No, we know that's not true based on Acts chapter 2. So what was the expression of this unity?

Look back at verse 32. It says, 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. Now I really know they're not Baptist. There's no way these are Baptist. And again, I come from that tradition. So like these people are expressing a radical generosity.

These early Christians lived by this biblical motto. Mi casa, su casa. Right? You didn't know I was bilingual. You didn't know I was so gifted with language.

Right? Like literally their life was lived as whatever is mine is yours. And whatever is yours is mine. Do you know why? We're one.

[16 : 06] We have been brought into one body. And that is the metaphor the New Testament uses for the church. These early Christians, because they were united, were radically generous towards one another.

In fact, to understand this generosity, I want to unpack this even further. Because I'm telling you, as I studied this passage, as I preach this passage, it blows my mind.

Question one. Who was generous? Who was generous? Well, the text says they had everything in common. So who's the they? It is those who believed.

Are you with me? So in other words, the believers of Acts 4 had everything in common and shared everything because they didn't see anything as being their own.

And here's what I want to ask. Okay, this clearly had to have been three people. And even then that seems impossible. Until you actually go back a few verses earlier in the chapter and your mind's going to explode.

[17 : 15] Look at verse 4 of Acts chapter 4. But many of those who heard the word believed. So these are the believers.

The same believers here in just a few verses. And the number of just the men of these believers were how many? Say it loud.

5,000. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. You're telling me. You're telling me. Luke, you're telling me that 5,000 just men who knows how many women and others.

And in Acts chapter 2, we know of 2,000 that were believers. You're telling me that at a minimum, a gathering of the first faith family of over 7,000 people lived in this kind of unity.

I don't mean this as a dig. I mean this sincerely. In 25 years of pastoring, that seems harder to believe than the resurrection of the dead.

[18 : 30] And I'm being for real. It is easier for me to believe in the resurrection of the dead than it is you can get 7,000 Christians to be united like this and generous like this.

This is a work of the Spirit of God. Amen. There ain't no human being creating this. This is God that has done this work.

Does that not blow your mind? I mean, we're just trying to get a few hundred to get along. Much less 7,000 or 10,000. And yet that is exactly what Luke is saying.

And when were they generous? When they had a building campaign? No. As long as the church was going their way and they agreed with every decision? No. Luke indicates that this was going on in Acts 2 as well.

In other words, it's happening in Acts 2. It's happening again in Acts 4, which means this is all the congregation all the time. I tell you, that is almost impossible for me to believe.

[19 : 36] If I didn't believe these words were not breathed out by the very authority of God, I would not believe them. But I do. Because this is God's Word. Amen.

Amen. And what were they generous with? Their old clothes? The leftovers they had from their garage sale? The ashtray from Colorado that you don't want anymore?

No? Look at verse 32 again. 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, I'm waiting for you to say it, everything in common. In other words, all the people, all 7,000 to 10,000, all the time giving everything.

And they did it on their own. There are no commands here. There's no guilt giving sermons. Just 10,000 believers of one heart and soul for Jesus. And why were they so generous?

[20 : 41] The text says they didn't see anything as their own. Now don't misunderstand. It did, in one sense, belong to them. I mean, ultimately, it all belongs to God.

Amen. But the text is not trying to be insensitive to the fact that they were owners. Look at verse 34. It says, There was not a needy person among them for as many as were owners of lands or houses.

In other words, they, listen, this is important. They were owners. They just didn't consider themselves as owners. It was their stuff, in one sense.

They just didn't consider their stuff, their stuff. They saw their life as entirely God's. And therefore, whatever was needed for the mission is anybody's.

To help and support and care for one another. This is, this is insane. No, this is the Spirit of God at work among the people of God.

[21 : 46] And what was the result of their generosity? Verse 34, again, there was not a needy person among them. The early church is an example of unity in the face of adversity.

They don't unravel. They don't give up. They don't pack it in. They come together. And they express that unity through radical generosity. And then what Luke's going to do is he's going to show you an example.

That's the broad kind of understanding of how the early church was living in community to each other. And let me just kind of, you know, narrow in. Let's go from the forest and let me show you one tree.

Let me give you one example, positive example. Then I'll give you a negative example. One positive example of this very thing. His name is Barnabas. Verse 36.

Thus Joseph, who was called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him. Who did it belong to?

[22 : 50] Him. And brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. In other words, all Luke is doing here with Joseph called Barnabas is this. Here's an example of the very thing I'm talking about.

Do you want one example of the thousands of examples that I could give you? His name is Joseph. They called him Barnabas. And do you know what he did? He owned a field and he sold it and he gave it to the mission.

He gave it to the work of God. Then Luke shifts to give a negative example. Really, the chapter division, which you know, by the way, came later.

Does everybody know that? Luke doesn't say chapter 5, verse 1. That's added later. It's a very unfortunate break in chapter 5, verse 1 because really the same narrative is continuing on.

You need to see Joseph or Barnabas as example 1, positive. Now example 2, which picks up in chapter 5, verse 1.

[23 : 49] Look at it. There's another man. His name is Ananias. He's got a wife named Elvira. I'm sorry, Sapphira. That's the Oak Ridge Boys song.

Anyway, sold a piece of property and with his wife's knowledge, he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.

And Peter says, I mean, this is a hard example to talk about.

And praise God, it's not normative. That was a really good place for an amen. Praise God, it's not normative. What I mean by it's not normative is that God does it in this case.

This is not always how God does it. Thank goodness. But what Luke is showing us here is an enemy of unity. There is an enemy of unity in the church.

[25 : 11] It is not all roses in romance. Ananias and Sapphira, who owned land, held back their generosity. And the question we should ask is, what was, this is very important, what was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?

And you might be quick to say, it was the sin of greed. You might say, it was the sin of lying. That's certainly in the text. And those two things are probably true to some degree, but you need to understand it actually goes deeper than that.

And this is really important. Lean in. The issue with Ananias and Sapphira is not their lack of giving.

It's their self-righteousness. You say, what do you mean? Here's why I say that. The reason why the issue is not their giving, are you listening, is because they were under no obligation at all to give.

That's not the issue here. They didn't have to promise anything. The issue here is they tried to appear as if they were as generous as they wanted everybody to think they were.

[26 : 29] This goes to the very heart of what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. Look at Matthew 6, verse 1. Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Listen, this will preach. Notice it on the screen. Ananias and Sapphira wanted the credit of generosity without the inconvenience of generosity.

That is, they wanted to look good without actually having to do good. Listen to me closely. Their issue is not the love of money. Their issue is the love of self.

What they are trying to advance is not the mission of God. It is the mission of their own self. And why does Luke put this story here? Because let's admit, it's kind of a downer.

[27 : 37] We read it and we're kind of like, I don't know really what to do with this. What is Luke doing inspired of the Holy Spirit to put this story right here? And here's what I think the point is. Ultimately, notice it on the screen.

Faith family, you cannot be on mission for Jesus and on mission for self at the same time. You can't. Listen, everybody else like Barnabas and the thousands of others, they are on mission for Jesus.

It is not about them. It is not about their stuff. It is ultimately about what can we do for the sake of the mission. But Ananias and Sapphira are in this to look good, to exalt self, to be in a real sense, hypocrites.

Now, we've talked about hypocrisy before and let me remind you again what hypocrisy is because a lot of people love to say, you know, I don't go to church because it's full of hypocrites.

And when somebody says that to you, you just say to them, and there's always room for one more. You can just come sit by me, all right? And here, I'm saying that, don't really say that. That's probably not appropriate.

[28 : 47] But here's the issue. We don't really understand hypocrisy. We think hypocrisy is somebody that has inconsistencies in their life. That is not hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is someone who has inconsistencies in their life but acts like they don't. It's the Ananias and Sapphira gene.

It's the, oh, I'm really, really generous. Oh, yeah, I gave that much. Oh, you wouldn't believe how generous I am. And Peter's like, really? Why did you hold that?

Why are you lying to God about your generosity? That's hypocrisy. And I'm gonna get back to that in more in a moment that I think is really important for us to think about.

But the main point here is this. You can't be on mission for God and on mission for self. If you're going to be on mission for Jesus, it means you've surrendered yourself to something greater than yourself.

[29 : 48] Maybe one of my all-time favorite movies, Remember the Titans. And all God's people said, Amen. If you've seen it, you know what I'm talking about.

If you haven't seen it, shame on you. You really should see the movie and I don't understand why you haven't seen it yet. Denzel Washington's in it for Pete's sake. Anyways, it's about a football team that's coming together on a common mission in the face of adversity.

The adversity is happening all around them and they come together in unity. But before that, they're fighting and at odds with each other and it's all about the mission of self and not about the mission of team.

And so early one morning, the coach decides to take them for a run. This is Gettysburg. This is where they fought the Battle of Gettysburg.

50,000 men died right here on this field, fighting the same fight that we're still fighting amongst ourselves today.

[30 : 58] This green field right here is painted red, bubbling with the blood of young boys. smoke and hot lead pouring right through their bodies.

Listen to their souls, men. They killed my brother with malice in my heart. Hatred destroyed my family.

You listen. Take a lesson from the dead. If we don't come together right now on this hollow ground, we too will be destroyed.

Just like they were. I don't care if you like each other or not, but you will respect each other. And maybe, I don't know, maybe he will learn to play this game like men.

What's the lesson there? He's trying to teach them to play for something bigger than self. And that's what Luke is teaching us here.

[32 : 21] He's giving us quite radical example of two people that are playing the game for themselves. They want to look good. They want to impress others.

Everybody else is just concerned about advancing the mission of Jesus. And so we need to ask ourselves, I need to ask myself, what mission are we on?

Are we on the mission of Jesus or are we on the mission of self? So, what we see here is we see unity in the face of adversity that is expressed through unbelievable generosity even in the face of the enemy of unity?

One final question as we close and it's this. What, like, what was the, what's the secret sauce? Like, you ever taste something that's so good and you're like, I want the recipe?

And y'all like that? Like, tell me what's in this? What's the secret ingredient? And so the question is, is what, what makes a church this united in the face of adversity?

[33 : 22] And what, if you have the absence of this, would create the kind of person or individual like Ananias and Sapphira?

And I think the key ingredient is in verse 33. And we'll close with this. And with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great, say it, grace was upon them all.

Grace was upon them all. In other words, what was it that encouraged their unity in the face of adversity? And the answer is the grace of God.

The apostles continually pointed to Jesus and the resurrection of the dead and what happened as a result, God's grace was continually being poured on them.

So why is grace the motivation for unity and generosity and why is it the antidote for hypocrisy? That's what I'm closing with tonight.

[34 : 32] So listen closely. How is it that grace is the fuel for our unity expressed in generosity and how is it the antidote of hypocrisy? First, grace is the motivation for our unity and generosity.

Here's why. You ready? There is nothing talking to you. There is nothing in your life you deserve.

Everybody should shout amen. There is nothing, nothing in your life that you deserve. You don't even deserve your life. Listen, you didn't earn your being born.

You didn't earn the ability to breathe. You didn't earn the ability to work and make money to therefore have possessions and you didn't earn your salvation before God.

In other words, the point I'm making is this. There is not a single thing in your life you have apart from the grace of God. therefore, if you didn't perform to get it, how can you be stingy with it?

[35 : 48] If you did nothing to get it, that is to earn it, how can you be stingy with it? So when you realize, listen, I don't have anything, and I mean anything in my life apart from the grace of God, then when I see someone who has nothing, I empathize with them and I minister to them.

Here's what I'm trying to say, zone in real quick here. An awareness of God's generosity towards you, grace, will produce the practice of generosity towards others.

That's the link. Why? Do you see it in the text? Like, come on, leap with me. Do you see it in the text? Their generosity towards one another was based on what?

What was the secret sauce? What was the key ingredient? The apostles are proclaiming Jesus resurrected from the dead and grace is falling upon them and as grace falls upon them, they realize there is not anything in our life that I deserve.

Nothing, nothing that I have earned. Everything is from God and so what would I be willing to give for the sake of the mission of God? Everything because without God, I have nothing.

[37 : 05] So that was the ingredient. That's the secret sauce. When you are growing in the gospel of grace, when you understand just how deep the grace of God is in your life, you don't have to twist arms for unity and you don't have to plead for generosity.

It's the natural outworking of realizing how much God has done graciously in your life. that's what produces people like Joseph or Barnabas or the seven to ten thousand people who are outside their minds.

Another, remember the Titans quote. That's the key. Now, here's the second part and I'm done. How is grace the antidote for hypocrisy? In other words, what Ananias and Sapphira don't have or what they're not living in is the grace of God and that's what produced their hypocrisy, their desire to please or impress.

And so let me break this down. Here's what I mean. Are you with me? People who are filled with grace, people who are filled with grace already know they can't impress, nor do they have to.

Think with me. People who are filled with grace know that they can't inform to impress. There's nothing I can do to impress God. My being able to be right before God and accepted by God comes from grace.

[38 : 44] So I don't have to perform to impress someone. In other words, grace allows me to continually believe this. Notice it on the screen. I don't have to pretend to be someone.

I'm not because God has already accepted who I am. Now think on that. I don't have to pretend, Ananias and Sapphira, I don't have to pretend to be someone I'm not because God has already accepted who I am.

Do you know how freeing that is? Listen, here's how you know you're a person, and I'm still learning this. I mean, this is why the Lord makes me preach this multiple times every week, right?

Here's how you know you're a person that is experiencing the grace of God. And I want you to think about this through the lens of Ananias and Sapphira. Listen, a person who understands grace is more likely to admit they struggle being generous than they are to try to convince others they are generous.

Think about that. Somebody who really understands God's grace is far more likely to say, I struggle being generous than they are trying to convince others they are generous.

[39 : 59] In other words, if Ananias and Sapphira had grace, here's what they would have said, Peter, I'm really struggling with giving this. Can I just be honest with you? I'm not trying to impress you, Mr. Apostle.

I'm struggling with this generosity thing. Instead, the approach they took, because it wasn't the grace approach, was this. Oh, sure, we gave all that when they didn't.

You see, without grace, you're always going to try to impress and perform and work your way into acceptance, both with others and before God.

In other words, if Ananias and Sapphira would have understood the grace of God, and if you and I would understand the grace of God, we wouldn't feel the need to perform for others or for God.

We would actually be able to say, you know what? I know I promised this, and if I could just be real honest with you, I'm having a hard time giving that.

[41 : 08] And I know that might cause you to look down on me, but here's the deal. I'm resting not in your view of me, but God's grace towards me. And like, that's a beautiful community.

That's a beautiful community that is filled of grace and doesn't feel the need to have to perform or impress. It's the kind of church I am by God's grace trying with all I can to create.

I feel like on most weeks I'm failing, but I pray that the grace of God would destroy the Ananias and Sapphira syndrome. that exists if it does to whatever degree in this church where you feel like you have to impress in order to be loved.

Faith family, Acts 4 is a beautiful picture. It is a beautiful picture of unity in the face of adversity. It is a beautiful picture of God's people coming together in the face of hardship.

a church of several thousand people who didn't pack it in, who didn't unravel in hard times. And I read this and I think it's so abnormal.

[42 : 25] But it shouldn't be. And do you know why it shouldn't be? Because you and I are followers of a prisoner of war.

a man captured, tortured, and beaten and was able to utter up the strength not to say God bless America.

He was able to gather the strength to say, Father, forgive them. And from the adversity of the cross came the birth of the church.

And it's the only thing. look at me. It's the only thing that will hold a church together until the day we finally fall into his arms.

And God's people said, amen. Lord, thank you for your grace in passages like this.

[43 : 32] What a beautiful picture of the church. what a beautiful picture of the work of the spirit bringing these thousands of people together in one heart and one soul.

And they are so generous. grace. And it's all because of grace. It's because as the apostles proclaimed the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus, grace fell upon them.

It changed the way they approached one another. It changed their attitudes towards one another. It changed the way they lived in community. God's I pray, Lord, by your spirit that you would, as you know precisely how to speak to us what we need to hear this evening.

And Lord, that you would help us grow in grace and not feel the need to impress you, but know that we are accepted by you because of what Christ has done for us.

And so help us, Lord, continue to walk by the spirit and be on mission, not for self, but for Jesus. And we pray it in his name.

[44 : 45] Amen.