

We must Model Christ-like Generosity

Acts of a Healthy Growing Church

Acts 4:32-37

February 12, 2017

Welcome again to worship. I'm so glad you are here. I want you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin so that you can take some notes.

We are in the midst of our series "Acts of a Healthy Growing Church." We are looking back at the Early Church through the book of Acts and see how they were healthy and growing. I've listed in the bulletin the first five acts we covered. Today, our act of a healthy growing church is this: We must model Christ-like generosity.

Today's Scripture comes from Acts 4:32-37:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.¹

We've already noted several things about the Early Church. They were a fellowshiping church; they spent time together in worship and in each other's homes. They were a praying church; they knew what we learned last week:

Much prayer – much power

Little prayer – little power

No prayer – no power

Today we learn that the Early Church was a giving church. And why were they a giving church? Because they loved one another. This giving demonstration was not because of legislation or decree from leadership; it was an expression of the love they had for one another.

Jesus' words from the Upper Room were still resident in their hearts and minds:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.²

Jesus says that our Christ-like love will show we are his disciples. People will know we are Jesus' followers by our love for one another.

Now, love is more than simply warm feelings; it is an attitude that reveals itself in action. We love others as Jesus loves us by helping when it's not convenient, by giving when it hurts, by devoting energy to others' welfare rather than our own, by absorbing hurts from others without complaining or fighting back. This kind of loving is hard to do. That is why people notice when you do it and know you are empowered by a supernatural source.³

¹ Acts 4:32-37 (NIV)

² John 13:34-35 (NRSV)

³ Life Application Study Bible, John 13:34-35

And because of that love, the Church had these 3 things; write them down: power, piety, and provision,

They had power. Verse 33 says that they had great power. This power is greater than any power humanity has ever created. Greater than horsepower, electrical power and nuclear power. It is spiritual power, and this great power was given to the apostles to “witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus”.⁴

They also had piety. Verse 33 also says that they had great grace. Great power helps us in our **work** for the Lord; great grace helps us in our **walk** for the Lord. Great power is dramatic and spectacular, but great grace can often be just doing the ordinary. Note that only the apostles were given great power, but all were given great grace. Power was needed for exceptional work (which the apostles did), but grace was also needed for everyday living (which is where everyone lives).

In addition, they had provisions. Here we find a sudden change in the text. Up to this point, everything was moving in a most exalted atmosphere. There were great thoughts of God; there were prayers for the Holy Spirit; there were moving quotations from the Old Testament.

Now, without warning, the narrative changes to very practical things. However much these early Christians had their moments on the heights, they never forgot that someone had not enough and that all must help. Prayer was supremely important, the witness of words was supremely important, but the culmination of all these was love for one another.⁵

There are four keys to modeling Christ-like generosity with the provisions we see here.

First, the attitude for the provisions. Verse 34:

*There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales.*⁶

The attitude that made this practice of sharing provision possible was an exceptional unselfishness.

Instead, this was an attitude that grew out of love – Christ’s love.

Second, the accomplishment of the provision. Verse 34 again:

*There were no needy persons among them...*⁷

Remember, there had been tremendous growth in this new church. On Pentecost, 3,000 people were baptized and joined the Church. These people came from all different backgrounds. Some were from countries far off. They had come to Jerusalem for a spiritual pilgrimage, gotten saved, and stayed in Jerusalem with this new group of Christians. It would be like going on weeklong vacation and getting stuck there for over a month. I’m sure there were folks running out of money.

There were also people from different economical positions. We know that the man born lame whom Peter healed was a poor beggar. His source of income – meager as it was – vanished when he was healed.

So, it is clear that there was great need among them. But they accomplished something wonderful. Their Christ-like generosity took away poverty in the group.

⁴ Acts 4:33

⁵ Barclay’s Daily Study Bible, Acts 4:32-37

⁶ Acts 4:34 (NIV)

⁷ Acts 4:34a (NIV)

Third, the administration of the provisions. Look at the second half of verse 34 then verse 35:

*... from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.*⁸

At this point, the original disciples were the administrators of the gifts. Yes, the pastors knew what people gave.⁹ Later, this work was such a distraction to the disciples that they had to appoint others to do it.¹⁰ We will talk about that next week.

Finally, the applauding for the provisions. Verses 36-37:

*Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.*¹¹

We are introduced, for the first time, to Barnabas. His Jewish name was Joseph; Barnabas was his Aramaic name, and it was this name that he is referred to starting here and until the end of Acts 15. What do we know about Barnabas?

The text first tells us that he was a Levite. The Levites were one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and they were a special tribe. They were the religious and worship leaders by ancestry. The tribe of Levy was designated to assist with the worship in the Tabernacle, and then, the Temple. And it was from a subset of this tribe that the priests came from.

The text tells us that he was a resident of Cyprus. This may explain why he was a landowner. Levites were forbidden to own land in Israel.¹²

We are not told where he owned land. Most definitely in Cyprus, but I believe he owned something in or around Jerusalem, which makes sense because it seems Barnabas easily sold a parcel when he saw the needs around him.

He was a religious man, and even though he probably did not serve in the Temple because of where he lived, he nevertheless found himself in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and in the process, found Christ and the new church. And this conversion was entirely transformative. He becomes an important part of the leadership in the church. When Paul returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, it was Barnabas who took him and introduced him to the apostles.¹³ Barnabas and Paul had probably been companions as students in the school of Gamaliel. Barnabas became a leader in the church located in Antioch in Syria, and when the church there had grown too big for him, he recruited Paul to come to Antioch to help him. They were both pastors in that church for a year. Then by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that church sent Paul and Barnabas out on what would be the first missionary journey, and where did they go first? To Barnabas' home, to Cyprus. John Mark (author of the Gospel of Mark) was Barnabas' cousin, and eventually, the two of them went out on their own, while Paul picked up Silas and went on the second missionary journey.

⁸ Acts 4:34-35 (NIV)

⁹ See Acts 5

¹⁰ See Acts 6

¹¹ Acts 4:36-37 (NIV)

¹² See Numbers 18:20-24 and Deuteronomy 10:9; 18:1-2

¹³ Acts 9:27

Barnabas is actually 2 names. “Bar” means “son” and “nabas” means “encourage”, so Barnabas means “Son of Encouragement”, and it would prove, over and over, to be most appropriate. He was very dedicated to the work of the Lord.

It is in our passage today that he is first mentioned, and it is a good one. He sees a need, and out of the love that he has received from Christ, he shares that love by giving. He models Christ-like generosity.

Now, this action of sharing the possessions with fellow believers was a response to an immediate need. It is not meant to be the requirement for believers, but an example of the kind of generosity that makes an impact on more than the recipient. Notice that there are 3 results of this generosity:

First, there was unity in the church. Verse 32:

*All the believers were one in heart and mind.*¹⁴

Once again, unity was key in the Early Church, because no one wants to be part of a family – biological or spiritual – that is always fighting. When you were kids, did you like it when your parents fought? No, and neither do baby or young Christians like it when the church is fighting. Unity is the key.

Second, there was a powerful testimony to the community. We’ve already mentioned this in verse 33:

*With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus...*¹⁵

This self-giving – so absent in a world of people centered only on themselves – was a tremendous witness of the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Finally, there was no need among the people. Verse 34:

*There were no needy persons among them.*¹⁶

Imagine a community where there is no need, and you will see people coming to find their needs met: spiritual, relational, emotional, physical, and yes, possibly even financial.

Dick Alexander wrote, “I dream of a healing fellowship where the unchurched hundreds, even thousands; where the raw, broken, beaten, and hurt can be healed. I dream of a place where the discouraged can be lifted up – a place where people looking for love, can find the unconditional love and grace of God.”

When we model Christ-like generosity, people turn from self-destructive self-indulgence and become healthy and growing.

HOLY LAND TRIP

THE SEA OF GALILEE VS THE DEAD SEA.

¹⁴ Acts 4:32 (NIV)

¹⁵ Acts 4:33 (NIV)

¹⁶ Acts 4:34a (NIV)