

Acts 4:32-5:16

They Had Everything in Common

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. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ 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 ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Ananias and Sapphira

5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² 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. ³ 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? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. ⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you^[a] sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹ 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." ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Many Signs and Wonders Done

¹² Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's

Portico. ¹³None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Background

- What do we know about the church.
 - Fellowship with God has been restored for the first time since the fall.
 - They were filled with God's Spirit and power
 - They were unified
 - They were devoted to the Apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.
 - They were growing rapidly and now had more than 5,000

Last week Brett showed how Satan worked through the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court, to arrest and threaten Peter and John for teaching the gospel in the temple. Satan is a murderer, a liar, he is our accuser and adversary. If he fails at attacking as a "devouring lion" he comes again as a "deceiving serpent." The church must be prepared for his resistance. Let us go back and read:

Acts 4:1-3 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ²greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

- As Jesus taught in the temple, they were teaching in the temple and were stopped. Satan uses the religious rulers to try to shut them down. The religious leaders arrested Peter and John, tried them and threatened them. Acts 4:17 tell us what happened, "But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.

- All this did was embolden Peter and John and they went and told their friends and when they heard it they “lifted their voices together to God calling to their “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them” to let them speak the word with all boldness and heal the sick and perform wonders in the name of Jesus.
- So, the church was attacked from the outside by the religious leaders and Brett did a great job teaching the Scripture and had us all ready to share the gospel with uncompromised boldness.
- This week we are going to see the first sin inside the church. In contrast to his strategy to attack the church from the outside, we will see Satan attack the church from the inside. We know that sin is in every church. We see it clearly addressed in Paul’s letters to the churches in Philippi, Colossae, Galatia, Ephesus, and Corinth. We see sin and the divisive result of sin in churches in our community and in our own church. The honeymoon period of the early church is over. We started with this picture of unity, generosity, and power of the gospel that was the honeymoon period of the church, and now the battle is on between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of heaven.

Pray

I am going to start reading in Acts 4:31.

Acts 4:31 ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were **all filled with the Holy Spirit** and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

- The room had been shaken and they were ALL filled with the Holy Spirit. They were on a spiritual mountaintop and emboldened to speak the Word of God.

Acts 4:32-33 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. ³³ And with **great power** the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and **great grace** was upon them all.

- They were expectant of the immanent return of the Messiah. They were unified, were of “one heart and soul.”
- In their world, the material things were of little importance to them and they all considered their property as the Lord’s property. What a great attitude to have. Everything is the Lord’s, we are stewards for a brief period of time to manage His resources, and we are to have the attitude to hold everything loosely.
- The Scripture says Verse 33, with “**Great Power**” the Apostles were giving their testimonies to the resurrection of the Lord.
- Their testimonies were fueled by the GREAT POWER of the Spirit with boldness.

Revelation 12:11 We have overcome the evil one by the blood of the lamb and the testimony of the saints.

- Our testimonies of the Lord’s work in our lives are powerful. Not just on Sunday but to your neighbors, coworkers and friends everyday.

- And it says, “Great grace was upon them all” – Their debt had been paid. They were on a spiritual mountaintop and they spoke the Word of God with boldness. They were telling everyone about Jesus as the Messiah and were not afraid to offend anyone with the good news of Jesus, the cross, and his resurrection. Some believed and some did not. To those who do not believe Jesus is the “stumbling stone.” And to those who disobey, He is the “rock of offense.”

1 Peter 2:7-9 ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”^[a] ⁸ and “A stone of stumbling, and a **rock of offense.**”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. ⁹ But **you** are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that **you** may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

- That is our privilege. “To proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.
- They had received mercy and **God’s great grace was upon them all.**

Acts 4:34-35 ³⁴There 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 ³⁵and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

- “There was not a needy person among them.” It was customary to care for those who traveled a long distance to pilgrimage to Jerusalem. You may recall Simon of Cyrene who arrived to celebrate Passover and was called out from the crowd to carry Jesus’ cross. These travelers would stay through Pentecost and the community would care for them. So it was in the early church. They would be sure that no one would have need of basic necessities in the community of faith.
- They were anticipating Jesus to return quickly to establish His kingdom.
- This was not communal living and there was not a forced distribution of wealth, but they did share of their wealth because of their generosity. No one was required to sell their property, but some did as according to the need. Some had needs and others had means. Those with the means chose to sell their possessions to help those in need.
- We are not required to sell our possessions, but we are required to be generous. Why? Because God has been so generous to us. Communism and socialism is involuntary, but Christian giving is voluntary. They were happy to give to their brother in need. They were “cheerful givers” and God loves cheerful givers.

2 Cor. 9:7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

- Verse 35 says, “They laid their offerings at the Apostles’ feet.” They had previously brought their offerings to the temple and gave them to the priests. These Christians had received the Holy Spirit and they were now the Temple where the Spirit of God resides. They now entrusted the Apostles’ with their gifts to distribute according to the needs of the community.

- As we proceed with the passage, we will contrast cheerful giving and deceptive and sinful giving.
- And we will also see the establishment of the authority of the Apostles in the community that was necessary for the early church.

Example of Generous giving

Acts 4:36 ³⁶Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- Who is Barnabas?
- Barnabas is introduced to us as the “Son of encouragement.”
- Barnabas was from Cyprus. He was later sent from Jerusalem to the church in Antioch. It was there he goes to Tarsus to get Saul and later becomes Paul’s traveling companion on his first missionary journey that began in Cyprus.
- The Scripture says that Barnabas was a Levite. Levites were not allowed to own property, so we are not certain how he came to own this property. But it probably represented his entire life’s savings, all that he had. And he laid it at the Apostle’s feet.
- He did not specify where it would go. This is for building a wall or a specific mission, but he trusted in the authority given to the Apostles.
- Barnabas illustrates the cheerful giver who had a ministry of encouragement. He recognized that everything that he has is from God and willingly gave sacrificially.

Paul describes the attitude of generosity we should aspire. The church in Jerusalem was suffering and Paul was collecting an offering for them among the churches and he tells us about the church in Macedonia.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 We want you to know, brothers, ^[a] about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their **extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.** ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴**begging us earnestly for the favor** ^[b]**of taking part in the relief of the saints—** ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Out of their EXTREME poverty, they begged to take part in blessing their brothers in Jerusalem

Example of sinful giving

Acts 5:1-6 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ²and 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. ³But 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? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." ⁵When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And **great fear** came upon all who heard of it. ⁶The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

- Ananias and Sapphira contrast cheerful and generous giving by illustrating giving out of a deceitful heart.
- They were not deceitful because they did not give everything. They were not commanded to give everything. They were deceitful because of the **attitude** that they had in their giving. They were more concerned about reputation than character.
- The Scripture says, "they kept back some of the proceeds." The Greek word "**nosphizo**" means to put aside for oneself in a secret and dishonest way.
- The honeymoon is over and sin had entered the church.

Matthew describes the attitude we are not to have when giving.

Matthew 6:1-4 "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. ²"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. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And in verse 19 he goes on to tell us how to give.

6:19-21 ¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[a] destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- The church was praising Barnabas for his generous offering and Satan whispered into Ananias and Sapphira’s ears, “you too can also receive glory! You can make others think that you are as spiritual as Barnabas.” Hypocrisy is deliberate deception, trying to make people think we are more than we really are.
- Satan, the deceiver, attacked the church from the inside. He filled their hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit and they were guilty.
- Their sin was not robbing God of money but lying to Him and robbing Him of His glory.

And then Sapphira comes to Peter.

Acts 5:7-11 ⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you^[a] sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” ⁹ 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.” ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And **great fear** came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

- And “great fear” came upon all those who heard of it. Fear in response to God’s swift judgment. Be glad we do not experience the same swift judgment today. “Great fear” was also a healthy fear of reverence and awe of God’s displeasure. And it swept over the church and all who heard the story.
- Why such a harsh judgement? God is serious about sin.
- Whenever we come to a new point in salvation history, God makes a particular point of the seriousness of sin.
- Recall God’s command to Joshua after Israel entered the promised land not to take the possessions of the people of Canaan. Remember Achan? Who disobeyed orders and kept some of the silver and gold. He, his family and his livestock and all his possessions were burned and stoned to death.
- God has ushered in his new kingdom with the sacrifice of His only son. It is important that sin is dealt with harshly and Satan is put on warning that this is the Lord’s church.
- We have moved from **Great Power** in their testimony to the **Great Grace** they all had in Jesus to **Great fear** of the seriousness of sin.
- Peter asks the question and calls out the sin leading to God’s judgment. I think God is also using this severe judgment to elevate the authority given to Peter and the Apostles. These guys are the leaders of the church. They will face stiff resistance and competition for leadership. God knows this and acts to make sure everyone in the church knows the story.

How did the church respond?

Acts 5:12-16 ¹² Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among **the people** by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in **Solomon's Portico**. ¹³ None of **the rest** dared join them, but **the people** held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

- Many signs and wonders were regularly done among the **people** (the people visiting the temple) by the hands of the apostles. And “They” – (the **people**), tells us where they were. The citizens and visitors were at Solomon’s Portico.
- **V 13.** None of the rest dared to join them. Who are the “the rest?” The other believers. The Apostles were at Solomon’s Portico proclaiming the gospel with signs and wonders authenticating their teaching. Some believed and some did not, but all the **People** held them in high esteem. To the great displeasure of the religious leaders.
- Remember they had just seen Peter call out the sin in the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira and “Great Fear” was among all who heard. When people get “Great Fear” they earnestly seek to get right with the Lord and open the doors to the miracles of the Apostles.
- **V. 14** And when that happens their faith grows. “More than ever believers were added to the Lord.”
- **V 15** And the Authority of Peter as an Apostle of the Lord was authenticated and established so that they, the believers in Jesus as the Messiah, recognized and regarded the Lord’s appointed leaders of the church as having the authority given by God.
- **V 16** And notice, “they were all healed.” No one was sent away for having little faith.
- Challenges to the Apostles authority would come, but God had confirmed and authenticated His authority that would establish these chosen ones as the leaders of the church.

- The severe judgment of Ananias and Sapphira put God's stamp of authority on the Apostles. Establishing the authority of the apostles was important because it conveyed God's authority to the letters circulated to the churches for encouragement, training and correction.

So what does Jesus want me to know?

- **The Church must anticipate and be prepared for Satan's attack both from the outside and the inside.** The church represents the body of Christ. Satan, the devouring lion and deceiving serpent will use every means to try to overcome the church.
- **They had GREAT POWER in their testimonies and preached the Word of God with boldness.** Our testimonies are powerful and we should proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Not just in church, but everywhere we go. Tim Tebow.
- **They recognized the GREAT GRACE Christ had given them and regarded everything they had as the Lord's.** We must examine our hearts and give cheerfully to the Lord as we recognize how generous Christ has been with us.
- **God is serious about sin in his church.**
- **They had GREAT FEAR of the Lord.**
- Focus on the Family has a quote that has resonated with me and challenged me for decades.

“Do you really believe that what you believe is really real?,”

Truth Project, Focus on the Family

- They did believe. They were of one accord.
- They were not afraid to offend anyone with the story of Jesus.
- They had GREAT FEAR of the Lord and multitudes of men and women were added to the church and ALL were healed.