

The Gospel (Jesus) Changes Everything (Acts 4:32-37)

Everything in life had changed for the apostles since they began walking with Jesus. They saw life, the world and people in a new and different way. Values and priorities were rearranged. This was true for the apostles and it should be true for you and me.

Acts 4:32-37 “And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each to the extent that any had need. 36 Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37 owned a tract of land. So he sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

1. A New-covenant community of believers.

A. This community is in it's infancy.

We know where this church is headed. Jesus had said he would “build his church” (Matthew 16:18). This new community is certain because this gospel is unstoppable.

B. What kind of threats did they face?

There were threats from those who saw them as traitors to the Jewish faith. There were those who saw them as “opposition to Rome.” Perhaps the greatest threats were to their unity and to their integrity, to their tenacity to proclaim Christ. (32-35)

2. A Brief Review

A. Chapters 2 and 4.

In chapter two we saw the church grow by three thousand in one day. In chapter 4 it grew by five thousand.

B. What did this mean for these new believers?

This new community is made up of thousands of new Christians. Now they are followers of the Way, which most of their Jewish neighbors think is a heretical sect of Judaism.

Certainly some of these new believers were losing their jobs and their customers. Some were being rejected by their families and therefore were losing their inheritances. For many of these new believers there was no money coming in to pay bills and to feed their children. But they were regularly meeting with other new believers, some of whom had significant resources.

C. There was no disunity.

If we're concerned about the threat of disunity due to the disparity of their resources, Acts tells a different story. Why? Because the Spirit that indwells these new believers has been at work creating a oneness of heart and soul. They were made unstoppable by gracious generosity.

3. They were unstoppable by gracious generosity.

A. The apostles were preaching the grace available to all who are in Jesus.

They are also among their brothers and sisters experiencing that grace. This grace is pouring over them, and working its way through them, flowing out from them in radical generosity to others in the community whom they may not have known or been willing to associate with only a few weeks before. They are of one heart and soul because they are connected to the same Lord Jesus.

B. Something amazing is happening.

Those who had ownership of land are putting their land up for sale to raise cash to meet the needs of others. To understand this we need to try and understand what it meant to own property in the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

To have land in the promised land was to have a stake in God and all his promises to bless his people. This is why there were OT levirate laws of marriage that kept land in a family (Deut. 25:5-6). This is why land would be returned to its original owners in the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:28).

But something is becoming clear to these new believers in Jerusalem. They have a stake in God and all of his promises to bless his people. This stake is not in a plot of land but by faith in the person of Jesus Christ. All that they stand to inherit by being in Christ is so real to them that they're finding their grip loosening on what they've inherited from their earthly family.

They want to meet the needs of their new family, the family of those who have put their faith in Christ, if they have the means. They have become united to Christ in his death and resurrection. The old self that hoarded money is dead. It died in Christ. The new self seeks to be a good steward of their resources to the glory of God and for the good of others.

C. They had the same desire we have for financial security.

Most of us likely approach giving in terms of tithing a percentage of our income. But how many of us have ever experienced such great grace that we've been motivated to sell off assets that we were counting on handing down to our children or supporting us in our old age? and to give those proceeds to meet the needs of brothers and sisters in Christ?

The same grace that poured over these early believers has been poured over us. Do you need to loosen the grip of money and become a cheerful, generous, gracious giver who finds joy in meeting the needs of others?

4. Luke points to one particular person as an example.

Luke 4:36-37 "Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37 owned a tract of land. So he sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

A. Joseph, who is called Barnabas.

Barnabas means son of encouragement. We will learn more about Barnabas as we make our way through the Book of Acts.

B. Barnabas sold off some of the family land.

He gave the money to the twelve apostles, no strings attached. How could he do that? He knows that no matter what, he is not going to lose out.

Luke 6:38 "'Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.'"

He knows that because he is in Christ, he has everything to gain. He anticipates inheriting not merely a plot of land in the Middle East, but the entire earth.

Romans 4:13 "For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith."

