

7/24/22 - Acts 4:32-37 - "Christ-Centered Generosity"

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Date: 24 July 2022

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[0 : 00] So we have a sermon today of Christ-centered generosity, Christ-centered generosity. And the passage today contains a section of passage that is one of the many summary statements.

If you can remember, starting out this series, remember that graph I put up? My inner geek really shines with the little graph in the table and everything of how the book of Acts was structured and important things to note in that.

And so what we're in right now is a summary statement of the early church, which I believe that Luke did this for a certain purpose, in order to drive the emphasis and the movement within the book of Acts.

And so this summary statement includes isolated statements are different, but they're also the same in that they describe something, the life of the community.

And they detail certain things and they plug into the larger narrative that Luke is providing of this early church life, the church's life, everyday life, their witnessing and the testifying of Jesus Christ and the resurrection, but also the persecution that is occurring in this time period.

[1 : 30] Now, many of these statements include things like the fellowship of this church, this early church, the breaking of bread and the visiting in homes and that ongoing fellowship and the worship, the corporate worship of this early church.

But it also describes their generosity of them giving things that are, they've been compelled by God's grace to give like no other.

And so I would imagine that as he's laying out the details, the life, the witness and the persecution of the church, if we didn't have these summary statements, we might get the wrong impression of the early church, like it was a roller coaster of various events and no stability whatsoever.

It was just on to the next and then something happened and then a great miracle happened. And then all of a sudden they're in jail again and somebody's head's getting cut off and oh, they're stoning this guy.

But these summary statements were placed in there. So if you could imagine that we get Luke's purpose in these summary states in that if he created, we'll say two Instagram accounts, the first Instagram account just being that the good, bad and ugly of the early church.

[2 : 55] And so that's where we get like the miracles, the persecution. We'll be like, wow, that's quite a wild ride. This person lives, this person is experiencing wildness in life.

No stability. Is there anybody unified in this time? Is this happening everywhere? But then if he created another Instagram account and you saw Luke providing all the details of these summary statements alone, you'd be like, wow, that sounds really good.

I want to be part of that group. This is like Christian utopia. Like this is the place I want to be. They were unified. They were breaking bread. I mean, who doesn't like to eat?

And, you know, they were going inside homes. They were giving away, you know, these summary statements. I believe he purposefully intermixed these summary statements for that very purpose of giving emphasis of the how and the why.

You see, from the very beginning of the book of Acts, just a couple pages to the left, we see Jesus commissioning these apostles to the mission of the gospel.

[4 : 09] And from his departure and then the arrival of the Holy Spirit, we see that that led to the healing of the crippled man outside the gate called Beautiful. But intermixed within all of these events have been multiple summary statements where these statements provide a highlight that, yeah, they were arrested.

They were charged. They were threatened. But guess what? They returned and they were unified. And the unstoppable word of God was so prevalent and so apparent during this day that not even hell could stop it.

And so these summary statements are like the RPMs, I would say, of the book of Acts that drive what Jesus promised back in Acts 1.8, that you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem.

And then all Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth. And so he provided these summary statements, I believe, specifically for that purpose.

And that's where we're at right now. We're in this summary statement. However, looking at the passage today, it seems as if Luke pauses upon something.

[5 : 33] While many of these summary statements can be intermixed with talking about meals and breaking bread and various worship or prayer, he talks about this giving, this generosity going on.

And he actually uses Barnabas this week and Ananias and Sapphira next week in this contrasting nature.

And we'll get to that next week. But before we get ahead, why? Why does Luke pause on generosity?

Why did he use this entire summary statement in order to say, and they gave what they did with their possessions? And not only that, but really highly describing Barnabas.

Right? You see, God's relationship with us changes us. And how we relate to other people in our community, being united, breaking bread, fellowship.

[6 : 43] But also, how we relate to things, specifically our possessions. This is tough, I believe. Because if there's any vitality to be found within a church gathering, an assembly of believers, it will often be exposed in that church hearing and doing.

Not being hearers only, but doers of the word. And so, hearing, they're devoted to the apostles' teaching, but also doing. And one of those aspects of doing of this early church is how they treat their most needy members.

Which is directly related to what they're hearing. The transforming power of God. So, I'm going to break this up into two sections today.

If I lost you already, wake up. It's time to learn. And it's time to be challenged by God's word. And I have two sections. And we have, I'm going to break it up between verse 32 and 33.

And then from 34 to 37. So, the first section today is titled, Great Power and Grace Upon the Church. Great Power and Grace Upon the Church.

[8 : 04] Just as David read this morning. Verse 32 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.

Luke here summarizes the unity of these believers. After just coming out of a time of prayer. Unified prayer previously.

This followed after Peter and John's arrest and release from the Sanhedrin. But the unity of this church remained. And continued to remain regardless of the opposition.

And while the prayer was known as that they assembled, that they returned to like basically their people essentially. We see here that they actually were assembled now with the full number of people.

[9 : 11] And Luke goes to a certain length to actually indicate that this was all the Christians. This wasn't just a couple elite Christians that have it all together.

That have the cool robes and the hats that you would perceive as having it all together. But truth be told, those are usually the ones that have it all wrong or missing at various times.

This religious sense that we observe. And so, we see that this is the full number. This is known as probably about 8,000. 8,000 people.

Can you imagine 8,000 people? That's like an entire lecture room. Let's see. We could fit about 150 in this room. So, think about how many of these rooms would be filling that 8,000 room.

I mean, that would be like maybe like the front row of Joel Osteen's congregation. Unfortunately, sadly. But we understand that that is a lot of people, right?

[10 : 14] 8,000 people. And Luke is saying that this assembly was unified with everything in common concerning their possessions.

Not one, not even one of the 8,000 said that what they owned belonged to them. Wow.

Wow. Right? This is a succinct perspective. It's interesting. It's interesting the words that he uses, I believe, because he says that they, all who believed were of one heart and one soul.

And within, we know that this is the gospel spreading in Jerusalem. And so, this brings to mind the Jewish culture at that time period. A little bit of historical context of the Shema that was so prevalent in the Jewish people's life.

The daily prayers of the Jewish people to love the Lord with all your heart and soul and strength. Deuteronomy 6. We see that something happened in these believers' life that was transformed.

[11 : 29] Their heart indicates that their personal identity was completely changed. The heart is the center of the, the Proverbs say it's the wellspring of life.

And this is the vital center of human beings in defining our emotions, of dictating our thoughts, of driving our affections. And the mind, the pash, mind and soul are sort of intermixed within translations.

And this indicates the vital self, who you are. Because this doesn't describe necessarily a thing like a heart. This describes an action. And that's important to know that not only their heart and who they were, but what they became, their soul, was changed.

They were united. Their complete being united. Throughout the Old Testament, heart and mind are often used to describe complete devotion to God in worship.

And we could probably go through the Old Testament and pick up on well over 700 times of which the mind is referred to in this sense.

[12 : 47] But we see something happening here. That their devotion is based on Christ's sacrifice, the Holy Spirit's regeneration in their lives and converting them.

And we see that they become new people, new creations. And their lives, their very sense of identity is transformed. Just as Romans 12 says, present your bodies as living sacrifices.

This is an offer of true worship. This is love for the Lord. Now, I wouldn't imagine that this led to, like, religious communism in any sense of the imagination.

Where it's like, to own property is bad. Like, shame on you for having, even owning a house. You're not supposed to. You're supposed to give your house to someone else. Or abolishing any type of thing.

Maybe having a dollar in your pocket is to be frowned upon. That's not necessarily what's going on here. But when that dollar, when you say you're dedicating that dollar to the Lord and you're lying, we'll talk about that next week.

[14 : 09] With Ananias and Sapphira. But what's happening here is huge. And I'm going to try not to get too excited here. But this is religious revitalization.

Because if you consider the historical time period of these Jewish people, that this temple, this geographic location of the temple, was previously the means of provision to the poor, it is now through the people who are temples of the Holy Spirit.

That through their temple worship, they had voluntary offerings or tithes. They had obligatory tithes, Levitical festival, and poor tithes.

Deuteronomy 14. And that was what once was occurring, where the temple was the primary means of providing for the poor in the receptacles, in the court of women.

Now it is through the church. The Holy Spirit has set this church apart, dwelling with the Holy Spirit as God's temple.

[15 : 15] And we see that this is something changing here. Religious revitalization. And this assembly not only prayed with one voice last week in verse 24, and shared one faith, one identity, and one purpose.

This church was so united, similar to Israel's daily confession of faith and love for Yahweh, it is now found in no other than Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

Look at verse 33. The common neighbor right here for 32 of what's going on. And with great power. And with great power.

The apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them. You see, it is the grace of God that propelled the grace of his people.

It is the generosity of God in the gospel that propelled the generosity of his people. The gospel changes everything.

[16 : 27] This is a new Shema. This is a Shema that says, In Christ alone our hope is found.

Amen? Amen? Amen. Today we see that even now the waves of God's grace crashes upon our

lives today through the proclamation of the word, being hearers of the word.

The gospel reminds us also of how to do that word right. Reminds us that all that we are and possess is not of ourselves.

It is a gift of God. See, the mark of a church, converted by the power and grace of God, will be evident in their unity of heart and mind.

Completely changed. Along with handling their resources, individually and corporately. And you want to know the mystery of it all?

Not one of us sitting in this room deserves any of it. We were just singing a song about letting our breath praise his name.

[17 : 51] We don't even deserve the very breath in our lungs. That's why it's a gift. That's why it's a gift.

In that, with that perspective in mind, what enjoyment that we can have in the things that we have been given by God.

that it's not bad to have an extra dollar in your pocket. It's not bad to have a house to provide for your family, right? But we can enjoy our gifts and we can even rejoice when God is indicating that it's time to give something that he gave away.

Because he owns all things. And so we are in this gospel reality today. The gospel is the continuous reminder that unifies this church in one heart and one mind.

This church isn't rallied around some social justice or social activism. Like, well, let's go there because they're really providing for the poor. This is great.

[19 : 04] No, they were, that's putting the cart before the horse. They were converted by the word and testimony of the apostles. And in so doing, turned around and became very, very generous.

And their perspective was shifted. This is not a rally around social justice or social activism, but it was a product and a response of God's justice on the cross and God's activism within our lives as sinners and redeeming us by the blood of the cross.

We were all born into sin. And we've had this problem since the garden. All of us destined to hell at a certain point.

And God, in his great mercy, gave us Jesus Christ, of which we read in Ephesians 2, 4.

But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love, which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

[20 : 16] By grace you have been saved. This is good news, church. To imagine that there was a lot of blood spilled from Jesus, but not one of the drops of blood went to waste.

The promise of the cross is that by our faith we receive new life, new hearts, new souls, new perspectives.

And here we get a glimpse into the life of what that looked like, of generous, charitable lives, outdoing one another in honor.

So let's evaluate together the condition of our hearts and our minds today at Steel Valley Church as we kind of come to the halfway point of the message today.

Let God redefine how we view the things that we own. And we're going to do that as Luke provides for us a real life back then, illustration of this perspective shift in action.

[21 : 23] And so we see a second section of passage today. Great power and grace in action. And verse 34 continues, there was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands and 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 any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the name 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.

This is a real life illustration of what's occurring within the many at this time period. And I just want to do a conscience check.

I want the word to really reach the depths of our conscience in a scenario. So imagine times are good and God has blessed you immensely with possessions.

He's given you many things. You own five pieces of land, nice land, thinking of the agricultural day of this day. You know, crops are producing, good income, steady stream of income coming in from that.

[22 : 44] Five pieces of land, maybe five houses that you've been renting out. And there are needs that are prevalent within your church. What's your first response and consider selling them?

Some of them, not all of them. This is in religious communism. Considering selling a couple of them and donating the proceeds to the church. How does that sit in our consciences?

Well, if you're anything like me, as I'm thinking about that, I'm thinking like, man, I was really looking forward to that basement remodel and having a little bit of extra income for these things.

Maybe a pool, maybe a deck, maybe a deck for the pool. Right? All these things start coming into our conscience and just kind of talking ourselves out of doing such a thing or we justify, well, if we have all these strategies, steady streams of income, we could just provide more consistently for a longer period of time rather than just, you know, making this sizable donation.

Within that check, we have to understand that the movements of generosity within this church was due to the transformative power of God and grace in their lives.

[24 : 03] The power of God and grace of their life back then was reprioritizing their lives. That deck, that pool, those things that they had didn't mean as much as to steward resources in the name of charity.

That was the reprioritization. It's away from self-interest and considering the interest of others as more important. It's God's interests that drive our interests.

And we have to check ourselves once in a while of us drifting away from that charitable mindset. It's God who we worship and we must not get that backwards.

God does not worship us. He does not look down upon this ball in the universe and say, I'm just gonna keep blessing and I want my blessings to show in Rick's life.

I want that mansion he has to proclaim my glory. I'm gonna allow him to be worshiped. No. God alone will be worshiped.

[25 : 14] And those who have received abundantly from God will give abundantly as a testimony that God is first place in all things, that he is first place over all things.

He is preeminent. He is sovereign over all. Now, does that mean that we do as 2 Corinthians 9, 6 says, to sow sparingly, is to reap sparingly, and to sow bountifully, will reap bountifully?

Well, if you wanna take this out of context, sure. And that will indicate that, you know, we give to receive blessings. No. We have already received the greatest blessing of Jesus Christ in our lives. And all we have and all we need are found in him. And come what may, we know that God is in control. And so when we give, it's out of that generous heart of what we've received from God alone, because we know that God will always provide.

Barnabas. We're gonna read a lot about him in this series. Barnabas is quite a player in the book of Acts and popular name.

[26 : 24] Next to Simon, Joseph, his real name was the second most popular name back then. And we see that because of that popularity, I believe that Luke took great time of describing who this really is.

He says, this is Barnabas, called by the apostles Barnabas. So a nickname for him, which means son of encouragement. Not only, not those Barnabases or those Josephs, but a Levite.

Well, not only just a Levite, he was the one, a native of Cyprus. So back in this time period, they're like, ah, we know who you're talking about, Luke. Now why is this important?

Because look what happened. He sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. I want you to think about this.

He's used to broadcast such a common attitude. If we're talking about the unity of this church, the common mindset of this church, these believers with their abundance, we have to remember the very purpose of the church.

[27 : 37] God has assembled the church to broadcast to the world heaven on earth. That when we look around the room, we are a glimpse of heaven.

We protect the gospel. We proclaim the gospel. We observe ordinances and everything like that. At the doors of the church is where the world ends and the church begins. In our very lives, wherever we go, the world ends outside of ourselves and you are the church, the people of the church.

Not a building. It's not an idea. You are the people. And so, when we think about the church being a glimpse of heaven, that the unity within the church signifies something else, that we just look around in our gathering and we see the family who we're gonna be unified with for eternity.

Some that might freak you out looking around saying, I don't know if I want that. And good thing some wives are downstairs in the children's ministry right now. This might get some slaps over the head.

But it is through the generosity of the church that the world gets a glimpse of God's people entering what was known as the promised land in this new exodus.

[28 : 54] Because we have to think about what God has been proclaiming through the typological or the type of Israelites and God's people back in Deuteronomy 15, just as Moses prophesies, once the people of Israel are settled into the promised land, there need be no poor among you.

For in the land your God, the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance. He will richly bless you. And through the new redemption wrought by the blood of Jesus Christ for us, he has organized a glimpse of heaven not only in our unified heart and mind, but also in our unified prayers, our unified worship, and guess what?

Our unified generosity as well. This is something that proclaims that the church is God's. Truly, this is quite a typological illusion of the new community of God's people having been brought into the great power and grace of God in action.

We can't forget as well what Jesus said back in Luke. When he was in Luke 12, Luke recorded Jesus saying the parable of the rich fool and provided a warning to his disciples.

The warning to the rich fool was watch out. Be on guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

[30 : 30] Heaven on earth is not hoarding earthly treasure, but surrendering to heavenly treasure. This warning would be followed by Jesus to the disciples who were gathered around wondering about what he was saying.

And Jesus said, for where your treasure is, there your heart will also be. Isn't it pretty simple in saying?

This is not saying that having a savings is necessarily bad. It's not saying that having extra of anything in this life is bad. But where the rubber meets the road for us church, and I must encourage us, is that we have to be cognitively aware that we are accountable to God for how we use and steward those things in life that he gives to us.

All things. And when we think about these possessions, where's our hearts? Are we saving money out of fear of the future?

Do we find greater security in our money and treasures and possessions than we do in Jesus Christ? Are we so eager to have money and treasure and seeking means of money and treasure and forget about seeking Jesus Christ?

[32 : 05] What Luke indicates through Barnabas' actions is that he knew what he had, all that he had, belonged to the Lord. And out of the needs of the church, Barnabas acted in generosity that reflected the gospel in his life.

You see, great power, great grace in our lives will define what is truly valuable. We hold all things loosely in this life because Jesus is Lord over all and it's to him that we cling to tightly with both hands.

and so as we close up this what I would consider a two-part series, Christ-centered generosity, for some of us this might actually cause quite a bit of conviction depending on maybe what, where you're at in life with your possessions and having a church member over the other night talking about student loan debt.

Trust me, I know all of these things. We have to account all of these variables but it's ultimately between you and God and sometimes thinking about our possessions with a heavenly perspective we can be quite convicted because have we actually been struggling in our perspective of hoarding hoarding our best life now in this life and have kind of sensed this dullness and dryness come to our intimacy with God and through the Holy Spirit that if there's any encouragement in our life it's when we're receiving things from God that unless I get that new car I'm gonna be distraught unless I get that healing that we've been praying for I'm gonna be lost and so have we lost our perspective at certain times maybe not that extreme but with this culture around us with this American dream of the white picket fence of all these nice things living this comfy cozy life under the name of our constitution and growing in a prosperity sort of gospel tendency as if our relationship with God is based on what we have rather than what he gave what happens then when God takes everything from you leaves you with nothing what happens when you put on that religious religious garments and actually say oh yeah I gave all that and you're actually lying out of

your tongue we'll get into Ananias and Sapphira next week might God be calling you to apprehend the abundance of his grace and forgiveness in your life that was accomplished in Jesus Christ and transform your financial priorities

[35 : 20] Jesus said you cannot serve two masters and earthly treasures is Satan's bait upon the church of keeping us looking like hypocritical Christians fake disconnected to draw us away from God's grace and become a material sort of a materialistic Jesus Christ not a grace alone Jesus give this time today a heart check give this a heart check and discuss steps maybe with your family of how you're doing with that you have a pastoral staff here that would love to pray with you and see how we might be able to help budget we have a treasurer who has helped many people budgets in a way that glorifies God but I think for many of us I think that we can be reminded through Luke's account that we can count all things as loss in this life

God does mighty things in return even though we count things as lost we have to beware that we're not talking about to give in order to receive but we know one thing about God that when our heart is prioritized in giving that he will supply our every needs and probably bless us abundantly at various times and seasons but that's not why we do what we do we trust him all along the way and guess what when the church is living this generosity out when that is a mark of a church of generosity and spirit and heart and mind they will see what heaven looks like what that promised land looks like the church is not a building it's not a concept it's a specific reality that is personal when individuals come together together for rallying around God's grace power grace and power if unity is to be achieved it finds its source from prayer and teaching which breeds transparency it breeds generosity in meeting people's needs a unified church that assembles to honor God will redirect focus off of self-interest and pay attention very closely to the interest of others so church steel valley where is your treasure let's pray love as people have eye ha to limits and our your share why